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“What abou’ de lô?”

Trauma in Afrikaans Anti-apartheid Poetry

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1. Introduction

Today a little bit more than two years ago, I took a course on South African literature.¹ During one particular class, we were shown Charles Badenhorst's short animation "What about de lô?", for which Badenhorst had won the 2016 Grand Prize of the first Weimar Poetry Film Awards in Germany. Inspired by the anti-apartheid poem "What about de lô?" by Adam Small, the animation juxtaposes the text of the poem to images of daily life, emphasizing the cruelty of the apartheid regime.

Not really knowing anything more about apartheid than the fact that it happened, the animation and the poem struck a chord with me, and I remember crying in the classroom (luckily it was still winter and I could hide behind my scarf). I had been interested in poetry for five years then, getting to know different kinds of poetry with my monthly poetry club but never had I yet come across something from which such an urgency spoke.

My interest spiked and back home I reread Ingrid Jonker (the only book of Afrikaans poetry I had in my possession back then). A friend showed me N.P. van Wyk Louw. I stumbled upon a fragment of a poem by Breyten Breytenbach which put me on a scavenger hunt for months trying to find the original, complete poem. I started learning Afrikaans at the Zuid-Afrikahuis in Amsterdam. When in the spring of 2018 poetry bookshop Index Poetry opened at the Herenstraat in Leiden I bought every snippet of Afrikaans literature I could find there. In the summer of 2018 I visited Namibia and South Africa on a study trip organised by the Zuid-Afrikahuis, and I returned almost fluent in Afrikaans and with 42 books (which posed me for some problems with the weight limits on the domestic flights).

In this year, several questions started getting shape in my head. At times it felt confusing to read a language that seemed similar to Dutch, my own native language, but that dealt with such different issues. In the work of several authors that I had read, the history of apartheid was very present and I had never read so extensively about any national trauma before, apart from the trauma of the Second World War which is of course very present in Dutch literature. But the trauma of apartheid felt so different and the poetry I read about it as well. I started learning more about trauma and memory studies but although some ideas seemed to fit my experiences with the poetry, I could not make all the theory work for this subject. This was partly a more postcolonial subject than those theories were made for, and secondly, the situation in South Africa also seemed so much more

¹ I want to thank dr. Ksenia Robbe, who has supervised this thesis, and who has spent a lot more time on this supervision than she officially had to do: thank you for all your enthusiasm and for building up my academic confidence. I also want to thank Ingrid Glorie and Elize Zorgman for introducing me to both the Afrikaans literature and language and for introducing me to your wonderful network of anything Afrikaans-in-the-Netherlands.

complex than what could be explained by “just” postcolonialism (Viljoen, “Postkolonialisme en die Afrikaanse letterkunde” 159). This was something I had to delve deeper into.

This way, I formulated the following research question: to what extent can (the often Eurocentric) trauma theory be applied to Afrikaans poetry that deals with trauma? As the reader may note, I specifically do not call the poems I will analyse “trauma poetry” but “poetry that deals with trauma”. This is because trauma poetry has quite specifically been defined by several features which do not always appear in the poetry I will analyse. This does not have to mean that these poems are definitely not trauma poetry, but I do want to stay away from such a restrictive definition as I feel that it opens up more analytical possibilities when we look at poetry that in some way or another represents trauma instead of in the very specific way “official” trauma poetry does.

In the next chapter I will elaborate a bit more on the subject of trauma and poetry, followed by a chapter in which I will roughly explain the context of the works I will analyse: which authors I will discuss and what the socio-historical context is their poetry comes forth from. After that I will discuss the relevant theory for this thesis, for example the ideas on trauma literature that have formed the field on trauma studies and the postcolonial critiques that have been given on this subject. This chapter will be followed by an analysis of six poems by three different poets, Adam Small, Breyten Breytenbach and Ronelda S. Kamfer. They have lived through different stages of apartheid and all show different perspectives on the trauma. In my analysis, there will be room to see to what extent traditional trauma theory is useful to apply to these poems, but we will also see how new ideas on postcolonial trauma theory work when applied to a South African subject.

2. Trauma and poetry

For this thesis, I have chosen to focus on poetry. This poses a few difficulties, as trauma theory is often used to analyse prose. This has a few reasons and I will discuss some of the problems when applying it on poetry here.

First of all, the problem is one of form. Trauma literature is often associated with certain formal aspects. Things like the use of repetition and neologisms are associated with trauma in prose for reasons I will discuss later in this thesis. In prose these would be features that will stand out in a text. However, in poetry these aspects can be so ubiquitous that it becomes hard to relate them to the concept of trauma. Many poems use a lot of repetition and the use of neologisms is a lot more accepted in poetry than in prose. So when one runs into one of these features in a poem, it can become hard to relate them to trauma. The question becomes: are these features a signal of trauma literature or just inherent to the medium?

This problem works the other way around as well. Where devices like repetition and neologisms might be overrepresented in poetry, some other feature might be more difficult to find in poetry. In trauma prose, it is often noted that linear time is being disturbed. Flashbacks and gaps in the narrative are ways in which the trauma presents itself. Of course poetry *can* be narrative, but it is by far not as often the case to be as narrative as prose is. Something like the linearity of time may thus be much harder to detect within a poem than within a prose text.

The consequence of these difficulties is that it is much harder to pinpoint whether something is trauma poetry compared to trauma prose. With many of the poems selected for this thesis, it is open for discussion whether it is really trauma poetry. Therefore, in my selection, I focussed less upon these aspects of form and more on narrative and affect: does the poem relate itself to a traumatic event? Can it reasonably be assumed that the lyrical subject of the poem might suffer from trauma? I acknowledge however that this less formalist and more context sensitive approach can be quite subjective, but I feel that it does most justice to the medium of poetry. Therefore I decided for this thesis not to talk about trauma poetry, but about poetry that deals with the state of trauma.

Besides these questions of form and genre, I want to take only a few moments to position myself within the discussion on this specific medium and the subject of trauma. Not wanting to get into the whole discussion started by Theodor Adorno too much, as that is not the focus of this thesis, I only want to say that I am highly sympathetic towards the stance taken by Slavoj Žižek in 2009: "it is not poetry that is impossible after Auschwitz, but rather *prose*. Realistic prose fails, where the poetic evocation of the unbearable atmosphere of a camp succeeds" (142). Although I do think that the idea that all prose would fail is too extreme, I agree with Žižek that trauma is a subject that sometimes is

better portrayed in a medium where a realist portrayal is not always the main focus: “when truth is too traumatic to be confronted directly, it can only be accepted in the guise of a fiction” (142). The medium of poetry can be an extra step away from this direct confrontation and paradoxically, can thus be able to confront it more directly: things that one is not able to convey in prose might be easier to say in poetry. This shows the strength of poetry when it comes to the subject of trauma, and the importance of studying this medium as well within trauma studies, and to also develop the tools to properly do so. As I already mentioned above, not all the aspects trauma studies focusses on are all equally relevant to poetry, so in addition to looking at the relevance of different approaches of trauma studies for the postcolonial subject, it is also good to keep in mind to critically look at whether these theories work for poetry as well.

3. The poets and the context of their work

For this thesis, I have chosen to focus only on South African poetry written in Afrikaans. This was a conscious choice, wanting to take into account that it can be considered a political choice to write in Afrikaans and the consequences of this choice. Being the language of the apartheid government, Afrikaans has had the reputation of being the language of the oppressor. It has been mostly associated with the white, nationalist Afrikaner. This makes it interesting to look at poetry that rebels against the apartheid government, but is written in the language promoted by this oppressor.

Solely associating Afrikaans with white Afrikaners does not do the language justice. Around 40% of the more than 7 million people who speak Afrikaans as their mother tongue is white, but 50% is coloured and around 10% are black people. Thus, for many coloured and black people Afrikaans is their main language, the language of their daily lives in which they can best express themselves. Having your primary language associated with oppression can be difficult, as will be discussed more in depth when discussing the poetry by Kamfer. For now, it is important to mention that it can be seen as an act of reclaiming for coloured and black writers to write in Afrikaans, to make Afrikaans not only the language in which their oppression is written, but also their rebellion against it. It can give a voice to people who identify with this language, but never see their struggle reflected in anything written in that language.

Language is an important part of one's identity, as has already been pointed out by Julia Kristeva: "L'être humain étant un être parlant, il parle naturellement la langue des siens: langue maternelle, langue de son groupe, langue nationale... Changer de langue équivaut à perdre cette naturalité, à la trahir, ou du moins à la traduire" (385).² According to her, writing in a language that is not your own will not make for the same authenticity in literature as when you write in your native tongue. As I will be discussing such a personal theme as trauma, I think it is important that these writers chose to write in Afrikaans.

As I mentioned in the introduction, this thesis will focus on the work of three South African poets: Adam Small, Ronelda S. Kamfer and Breyten Breytenbach. All three write in Afrikaans and have written poetry in which the trauma of apartheid plays an important role. However, they all take on very different positions within their relationship to this trauma.

Adam Small (1936-2016) was a coloured writer from the Cape area. He is mostly known for his repetitive poetry and his many references to the Christian faith (Francken and Renders 72). Through his famous book of poetry *Kitaar my kruis* (1961) he established himself as a writer who

² "Being human means being something that speaks, one speaks naturally in one's own language: the mother tongue, the language of your group, your national language... Changing your language equates to losing this authenticity, to betray it, or at least to translate it."

speaks out against apartheid. Writing in Afrikaans, and at times even in Kaaps Afrikaans, Small gave a voice to the coloured people of Cape Town, relating to them in their own language about their own experiences. However, Small is not undisputed: amongst other things he has been critiqued for his use of Kaaps Afrikaans. In 2013, Nathan Trantraal accused Small of making Kaaps Afrikaans into a “joke-taal” (Marais). Within the discussion that followed, Trantraal’s brother André Trantraal tried to nuance Nathan’s stance, by explaining what he thinks he meant:

Adam Small het die gedigte en die toneelstukke geskryf wat linksgesinde wit Afrikaanssprekendes se sentimentele, stereotiperende, neerbuigende opvattinge rondom bruin kulturele identiteit bevestig en ondersteun het; wat die verwagtinge van bruin mense in hierdie opsig aanbetref, dié was van sekondêre belang. [...] Die gedigte en toneelstukke was geskryf vir die enigste mense wie boeke gedurende apartheid kon bekostig, wie sitplekke in die teater kon bekostig. (Trantraal)

According to André Trantraal, where it is often said that Small gave a voice to the coloured and black people living in the Cape area, Small’s public were not those people, but the white liberals who could afford his books. Thus, he was not giving anybody a voice but was simply giving presenting a view of coloured people that his public would like to see. Other South African intellectuals disagreed with this view by the Trantraal brothers and pointed out the strong connection Small felt with his community and the several times he explicitly stood up for Kaaps Afrikaans as his own mother tongue and that of his people (Pearce).

Of the selected poets, Breyten Breytenbach (1939) is probably the most famous one. Breytenbach was born to a Afrikaner family in the Western Cape. During his studies he already protested the apartheid government and soon he moved to Europe where he went to work as a painter and a writer. He published an enormous amount of poetry written in Afrikaans. In France, he married a French-Vietnamese woman, making it difficult to return to South Africa as he was in violation of the Prohibition against Mixed Marriages Act (1950) and the Immorality Act (1949), which forbade sexual relations between white and non-white people. Working from France, Breytenbach got involved in the fight against apartheid and in 1975 he got arrested when secretly visiting South Africa. He was sentenced to nine years of prison for high treason and got released early in 1982 thanks to international pressure. During his imprisonment, Breytenbach was allowed to write, but had to hand in all his work at the end of each day, with the promise that he would get it back at the end of his sentence (which he did). The works he has written in this period have been gathered in *Die ongedanste dans*. The poems that are part of this collection are characterized by a very hermetic style, “an intense degree of introspection, subtle reflections on the nature of poetry, sophisticated

literary references and a densely textured play with words” (Viljoen, “Afrikaans literature after 1976” 456). As many of them also reflect back on the situation in which they were written, it is from this collection that I’ve selected the poems for this thesis.

Ronelda S. Kamfer (1981) is another coloured writer from Cape Town who also writes in Afrikaans, although unlike Small she sticks to Standaard Afrikaans. She is also the only poet in this selection who is a woman, and by far the youngest. This makes her experience quite different from that of Small and Breytenbach: where they lived through the height of apartheid and had the opportunity to rebel against it, Kamfer was still quite young when apartheid was officially abolished and thus was not able to publish under apartheid. This being the case, in her poetry she reflects back in the history of apartheid, or she relates to situations about the aftermath of apartheid. Her work poses the interesting question about how much has really changed since the abolishment of apartheid: although there is no institutional apartheid anymore, there is still a lot of racism and disadvantages that coloured and black people are confronted with every day.

This thesis is not just about trauma in South African poetry, but focusses specifically on the trauma of apartheid, and the different ways this trauma has been portrayed in poetry. The selected poets represent different positions (man/woman, coloured/white, Standaard Afrikaans/Kaaps Afrikaans, etc) and have also worked in different periods. With Small, we’ll focus on the 1960s, Breytenbach’s work was written between 1975 and 1982, and Kamfer has written her work *after* the abolishment of apartheid. It is important to consider the circumstances under which these works were written. Small was allowed to publish his highly critical book *Kitaar my kruis*, but as a coloured writer had difficulty getting any official recognition. Typical for his reception is the story of the huge success of his play *Kanna hy kê hystoe* (1965), where he was not allowed to be present at some performances as the theatres would not allow coloured people. Only in 2012 he finally received the Hertzogprys, the most important literary prize of South Africa, where the jury had to bend the rules for him to make this possible: normally the winner of the Hertzogprys can only be awarded to authors that have published in the last three years, but because the discrimination under apartheid had made it impossible for Small to have received the price for his earlier publications, they decided to give it to him in 2012 anyway (Van der Elst 81).

Although Breytenbach and Small are both considered to be *Sestigers*, for this thesis I will focus on Breytenbach’s work from a later period, starting in 1975. Although Breytenbach was only able to publish most of his work after his release from prison, and during his imprisonment he had little to no contact with the outside world, in the few years before he got arrested the South African literary scene went through quite a tumultuous period. In 1972 André Brink published *Kennis van die aand*, which became the first book to be banned by the apartheid government. In that same year, Breytenbach’s own book *Skryt, om ’n sinkende skip blou te verf*, also gets banned (Bachrach 73).

More and more writers were speaking out against apartheid and the measures by the authorities became harsher. After his release, Breytenbach immediately took off to Europe again, from where he published the works he wrote during his imprisonment.

Kamfer is the only poet of this selection who never published under apartheid. She would not have had to consider government measures and any discrimination she might face nowadays will no longer be because of legal apartheid. Apartheid still plays an important role in her work, and in this case it is the above mentioned question of whether apartheid is fully over. In her poetry, the aftermath of apartheid and the racism she still faces every day plays an important role, and this way she shows us that the trauma of apartheid is hardly something that belongs to the past. Kamfer represents a new generation for which the work is not yet done. For this I want to refer to an analogy that was once told to me by a friend from Bloemfontein: “Under apartheid, we were all drowning. When apartheid was abolished, it was like a boat everybody could climb onto. But now we’re on this boat in the middle of the ocean and the older generations are saying we have to be glad we’re on this boat, but we, the born-frees³, are wondering: why aren’t we trying to get to the shore?”⁴

This thesis will explore the theme of trauma in the poetry of Small, Breytenbach and Kamfer, and thus it is necessary to shortly discuss what has already been said on this subject when it comes to these poets. When it comes to Kamfer I can be very short about this: although Kamfer has been well received critically, she is still a relatively new poet and hence there have not yet been many publications about her. Trauma is generally recognized as a theme within her work and mentioned in reviews and on the covers of her books, but the amount of academic articles on her work is still too small to give a decent overview of the scholarship on trauma in Kamfer. To some extent, the same goes for Small. Of course, Small is a much older poet who has been recognized to the point that he has become part of the canon. But although there have been many more publications on Small than on Kamfer, none of them extensively deal with the subject of trauma. Breytenbach is the exception in this situation. A very popular *and* complex poet, there has been written a lot about him in academic circles. Perhaps because of his history of imprisonment, the theme of trauma has come up here as well, for example with writers like Ioan Davies (1990) and Louise Viljoen (2009), who have specifically looked at his prison poetry as well. However, I do have to note that this is not always in the sense of traditional trauma theory: although trauma has been recognized as a theme within his work, maybe because of his complex, hermetic style, many analyses also discuss many other themes.

³ Born-frees: a term used for the generation born after the abolishment of apartheid.

⁴ I want to thank Sherridine Dunn for sharing with me this wonderful and clarifying allegory.

4. Trauma studies and the postcolonial subject

The field of trauma studies arose within literary studies after the atrocities of the Second World War to help make sense of the new kinds of texts and cultural objects that came forth from this trauma. This new field drew on several earlier theories like psychoanalysis, Holocaust studies and deconstructionist theory (Kurtz 422).

One of the biggest influences on trauma theory has been Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. In this case, trauma refers to a specific event which made such an impact that it disturbs memory, language and a linear experience of time. The disturbance of memory can be found in the subject not actively remembering the event, but re-enacting it throughout certain moments in their life: this can be the basis for a neurosis, for example through small gestures related to the trauma that need to be repeated over and over again. The shocking nature of the event might also cause someone to not be able to find the words to talk about it, but paradoxically also have experienced the need to talk about it (Graham 127). This loss of language, the inability to talk about the event, is called 'the aporetic dictum' and is one of the main points of focus Cathy Caruth uses for her ideas as well (Visser 274).

The disruption of a linear experience of time displays itself for example through the experience of flashbacks, when an event in the past is experienced as though it is happening in the present. All these features come forth from not being able to understand the event completely, or as Caruth tells us, "What returns to haunt the victim (...) is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (6). It is not understanding how the event could have happened, or how it could have happened to the subject, that makes it traumatic.

The approach of psychoanalysis is individual-centred as it focusses on the traumatic experience of one subject at a time. Given the focus of my research, this might be problematic, because in the case of the trauma of apartheid, we do not only look at individual traumas but also at the collective trauma of the South African society. Communities as a whole have been traumatized and not just individuals. Also, the assumption in psychoanalysis that the trauma has to come forth from one specific event becomes difficult when we look at a trauma caused by structural oppression.

Another important aspect is that this approach regards a trauma as treatable: through extensively talking about the subject a person can work through it and a linear timeframe can be restored and neuroses will disappear (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 59). In the aftermath of apartheid the focus has been on working through the trauma, solving it, and being able to go on with building a new country. In postcolonial contexts, however, not everybody feels a need for this kind of psychology offered to them, as it was again western-based and thus felt like a new kind of

imperialism imposed by the West on the oppressed (Beneduce in Borzaga 69). Wanting to have the victims of apartheid 'get over' their trauma can be seen as being pushed from a sense of guilt from the oppressor. "[The]"talking cure" paradigm of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee is inadequate in itself to account for the complex dynamics that emerged from and shaped South Africa's revolutionary transition due to that paradigm's tendency toward a depoliticized individualist psychology" (Graham 127). Some victims thus disagree with the need for 'healing,' for 'getting over it,' claiming the trauma is part of what made them who they are and also what shaped their communities. Working towards a point where all is forgotten (and forgiven) does not do justice to their history. It is however a stance that is often said to be taken by Desmond Tutu, who led the Truth and Reconciliation Committee⁵. In *No Future Without Forgiveness* he explains his own vision on the workings of the TRC, referring to Ariel Dorfman's play *Death and the Maiden* (1990). In this play, a woman is confronted with the man who tortured and raped her. He is at her mercy and she has a chance to kill him, which she wants to do because he denies everything that has happened. It is only when he admits what he has done, that she suddenly lets him go. This is what Tutu hopes will be possible in South Africa as well:

Our nation sought to rehabilitate and affirm the dignity and personhood of those who for so long had been silenced, had been turned into anonymous, marginalized ones. Now they would be able to tell their stories, they would remember, and in remembering would be acknowledged to be persons with an inalienable personhood. (30)

Tutu hopes that, just as in *Death and the Maiden*, the acknowledgement of the trauma will be enough to move on. It is this vision that Beneduce, Graham and others disagree with, claiming that for many people, it will take more or may be even impossible to ever truly move on.

To apply the psychoanalytic part of trauma studies to literature, one can look at certain aspects of time and language. The use of flashbacks or several intertwining timelines can be seen as a feature of trauma in literature. The loss of language can be expressed through a character that has trouble finding the right words for their experience or through the use of neologisms: when normal language fails, a character might look for new ways to express themselves. Of course, this is not necessarily always the case: not every book with a flashback is a case of trauma literature, but we do see many uses of these kind of disruptions of time and language in literature that is considered trauma literature.

⁵ From now on referred to as the TRC.

The second large influence on trauma studies has been Holocaust studies. Seen as the major trauma of our modern times, it is often used as the case study when examining trauma. It has to be said that due to its scale, a strong case can be made to use the Holocaust to examine the edges of the possibilities of writing about trauma. Holocaust literature is so broad and well-researched that a lot of valuable ideas can be found there. Contrary to psychoanalysis, trauma studies with a foundation in the Holocaust experience do not have to be individualistic, as it also looks at the collective experience of the trauma.

Through Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, trauma is not even confined to the generation that lived through the traumatic events. Postmemory explores the possibility of the transmission of a trauma to second generations and Hirsch explains the term and its difficulties as follows:

[This term reveals] a number of controversial assumptions: that descendants of survivors (of victims as well as perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection *memory* and thus that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory *can* be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event. At the same time - so it is assumed - this received memory is *distinct* from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants. Hence the insistence on "post" and "after" and the many qualifying adjectives that try to define both a specifically inter- and trans-generational act of transfer and the resonant aftereffects of trauma. (106)

This concept has made a big impact on the field and has also raised some criticism, for example by Ernst van Alphen, who does not deny the second generation can be traumatized, but prefers an approach where the trauma of the second generation is not based on the same trauma as the first generation, but on the trauma of being raised by a traumatized person (482).

Many works on the Holocaust have been extensively analysed, with Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980) probably as its most famous example. However, although the extensive research of Holocaust literature is of high value to that specific part of literature, it is questionable whether these analyses are always useful in other cases of trauma as well. Despite the large scale of the trauma of the Holocaust, the crimes that caused that trauma are still different from the one victims of apartheid experienced and a one-on-one comparison would do justice to neither victim.

The third influence on trauma theory Kurtz names is deconstruction, on which he reflects as follows: "mainly because deconstruction embraces the fundamental paradox that, while texts are of paramount importance in shaping our perceptions, the textual representation of reality is never

straightforward, always provisional and perhaps even impossible” (422). A deconstructivist analysis would, according to Kurtz, focus on “representational gaps and disarticulations” (423). Contrary to psychoanalysis, deconstruction is much less based on a certain perception of how the human mind would work and thus is more broadly applicable. Through careful reading, deconstruction will look not only at what is present in the text, but also at what might be absent. This can be interesting because of some previous discussed features of trauma literature like the aporetic dictum and non-linear presentation of time. Memory might also be disturbed and it is exactly these gaps and inconsistencies that deconstruction can analyse. An example of this is Michael Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory, where he suggests that “we consider memory as *multidirectional*, as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (3). To him,

memory’s multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interaction with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction. (5)

The example he uses to explain this is the attention that the trauma of the Holocaust gets in the United States, compared to the little attention there is for the trauma of the Afro-American population. According to Rothberg, the trauma of the Holocaust covers up the trauma of the Afro-American population, because that trauma still feels too big to handle, whereas there is more distance towards the Holocaust.

As seen above, trauma studies so far finds its foundation mostly in European and Western scholarship and history. Psychoanalysis is based on ideas about a subject rooted in Eurocentric culture and Holocaust studies reflect back on a particular part of history for a particular group of people. Although trauma studies have proven to be very useful in itself and for the subjects it studies, it can be questioned whether it is also applicable to a postcolonial subject. Trauma studies and postcolonial studies are quite different fields and in 2011 Irene Visser noted that “at present [there is] no consensus about the question whether trauma theory can be effectively “postcolonialized” in the sense of being usefully conjoined with or integrated into postcolonial literary studies” (270). One of her main points of critique is the focus within trauma studies on psychoanalysis and its definition of trauma, which underlines the trauma coming forth from a single event and causing symptoms that we relate to disorders like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She takes a critical position towards the focus on this western perception of trauma and argues for “employ[ing] a model of trauma incorporating non-western templates for understanding psychic

disorders related to trauma” (272). For example, the aporetic dictum that is so strongly underlined in Caruth’s work might have seemed logical in Freud’s context, with individual victims suffering from singular events, in a cultural context where talking about these kinds of experiences might not be encouraged – at least, outside of psychotherapy. But when one is looking at a postcolonial, non-western subject, the circumstances might be so different that these ideas might not be relevant anymore. In a case of a group of people traumatized by a longer period of history, with a strong sense of community and a history of oral literature, the aporetic dictum might be experienced in a wholly different way or maybe not at all (Visser 274). Trauma might be experienced in a different manner and may need to be treated in a different manner as well. Its expressions in literature may be different as well and so looking for the same features of trauma literature in a postcolonial work can be counter-productive.

In their introduction to a special edition of *Studies in the Novel* that focusses on postcolonial trauma novels, Stef Craps and Gert Buelens also underline the damage that can be done by still using a theory based on the Euro-American context for analysing African literature, thus agreeing with Visser. “[B]y ignoring or marginalizing non-Western traumatic events and histories and non-Western theoretical work, trauma studies may actually assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric views and structures that maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world” (2). Just as Visser, one of their main points of interest is that traditionally, trauma theory focussed on individual psychology. Colonial trauma being a collective experience thus complicates the use of traditional trauma theory. They propose a transition, however, they do admit that “it is hardly evident how this transition might be effected” (4).

Where Visser, Craps and Buelens already questioned the combination of trauma theory and postcolonial studies, Michela Borgaza problematized it further in 2012. Not only does she question the same things as Visser does, but she also tries to look for solutions to better implement trauma theory within the South African context by looking if she can find non-western theories that can contribute to trauma theory and make it more inclusive. She looks for ways to find room within trauma theory for the long term traumas of racism, colonialism and other forms of oppression. “For much too long, the story of trauma has been told in terms of events and accidents, but to what extent can we conceive of poverty as a traumatic event that overwhelms the subject from the outside, too unexpectedly to be processed” (73). To solve her problems with the Eurocentric way of thinking, Borgaza turns herself towards postcolonial thinkers like Franz Fanon and Achille Mbembe, and she tries to take into account the specific cultural circumstances of the victims that might not work together with traditional trauma theory. As an example, she refers to fragments from *There was this Goat* (2009), co-authored by Antjie Krog, Nosisi Mpolweni and Kopano Ratele, where the testimony of apartheid victim Mrs Notrose Nobomvu Konile is analysed. Her testimony stands out

because it was experienced as “awkward, unintelligible and incoherent” (Borzaga 66). Borzaga recalls how

Krog *imagines* two white academics commenting on the quality of Mrs Konile’s testimony. One of them uses ‘trauma theory’ to explain the inconsistencies and incoherencies of Mrs Konile’s words. Both implicitly refer to Cathy Caruth, Elaine Scarry, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub and, being familiar with their work, they hypothesize that it is the pain and the trauma Mrs Konile had experienced that didn’t allow her to articulate and structure her testimony meaningfully. She had become pure pain and there was no space left in her for language; language had been destroyed by trauma. Her testimony was but a symptom of another unspeakable story that would reveal itself on the surface only in bits and pieces. (67)

However, according to Krog these imaginative academics would not come any closer to understanding Mrs Konile, as her cultural context has not been taken into account. Further on in her article, Borzaga refers to a dream Mrs Konile talks about. Of course a dream is something psychoanalysis has a lot of experience with but when one does not take into account the culture that produced Mrs Konile (and within which she narrates her dream) one will not be able to understand what this dream will mean for her personally and her community, as the Xhosa culture has its own ideas on the meaning and interpretation of dreams. Borzaga, along with the writers of *There was this Goat*, pleads for a trauma theory that has room for these kinds of culture differences.

However, one aspect about her theorization still seems problematic. Borzaga keeps mentioning the South African context as a whole for which this new postcolonial trauma theory would be necessary. However, because of the diversity of the South African population, this might still be problematic. For example, western theories can still be easily applicable to certain South African groups, like the Afrikaners and the people of British heritage. But when we look at native groups, it might be that the differences in the cultures of the Xhosa and Sotho may call for a different approach, making it hard to develop one theory for South Africa as a whole. Even when a distinction would be made between a trauma theory for the different cultural groups, South Africa’s melting pot would still problematize things, as it would be unclear how to deal with mixed groups like for example the Griqua, the Indian, the Cape coloured and even the Afrikaner community. Borzaga herself mentions the importance of communities and the concept of ubuntu for the experience of trauma. An ubuntu-based philosophy can have a huge influence on such an experience, but it should not be overlooked how many people in South Africa have Christian ideals as their main philosophy instead of the concept of ubuntu (and even, the large extent to which the concept of ubuntu has been Christianized (Tutu 43)). When looking at a work like *Country of My Skull*, we see Krog mention

big differences between the way she and her fellow white colleagues deal with the trauma, and the way the black and coloured journalists approach it. If one wants to take all these differences into account, it will be hard to still create an approach that will be applicable throughout the country of South Africa. This might lead to a kind of relativism that might make the approach unworkable. Borgaza's relation to the theories of Fanon and Mbembe and their pan-Africanism thus have to be treated carefully to find a balance between relativism and universalism.

The idea of a focus on community instead of Freud's individualism seems a step forward, but we need to remain careful about the meaning of a concept like community in a difficult context like the South African one. There are huge cultural differences between the different groups in South Africa and not only may their cultural differences make for a different way to deal with trauma, it might also have made for a different experience in South Africa's history, not only between whites and non-whites, but also between black and coloured groups and other intersections like religion and language. Carefulness is needed not to "exclude the particular historical, social, cultural and personal contexts of trauma. [It is important to] take into account the specific context in which individual and collective traumas unfold by representing voices and experiences that cannot be subsumed into generalized models of trauma" (Miller 147).

A possible approach can be found in Chris N. van der Merwe and Pumla Godobo-Madikizela's⁶ work *Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on Working through Trauma* (2007). They claim that "[w]ithout the integration of traumatic events into cultural discourses, individuals as well as society in general stay traumatized" (58). After that, they propose a list of five "qualities typical of the literary narrative that make it extremely useful as a vehicle for the expression and discussion of trauma" (59). They distinguish "indirect confrontation and expression of trauma," "from chaos to structure," "imagining new possibilities," "healing a divided society" and "the specific and the universal" (60-62). These qualities provide an excellent start to deal with trauma narratives, and leave much room for implementing different cultural discourses. For Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela they are primarily a way in which reading literature can help a traumatized subject overcome their trauma, but these qualities are equally applicable as a broader concept than just from a reader-oriented perspective. Without going too much into detail about cultural differences, they name several stages of the process of dealing with a trauma that literature can address, and thus give several opportunities for analysis.

When discussing the application of trauma theory to the experience of postcolonial subjects, there is one poet in my corpus I have to pay a bit more attention to as it is questionable how he relates himself to the communities mentioned. Whereas Adam Small and Ronelda S. Kamfer are both

⁶ It is noteworthy that Gobodo-Madikizela is primarily a psychologist and thus will have worked with that perspective as a starting point.

coloured writers who lived (at least part of their life) under apartheid, Breyten Breytenbach is the only white author amongst these three, and already soon in his life he chose to live in Europe instead of South Africa. Having spent seven years in prison for his part in the resistance against the apartheid government, nobody will question if he suffered under this regime, but the fact remains that his experience under apartheid has been very different from Small and Kamfer's experiences of political and social repression, whose every aspect of their daily lives will have been governed by the lack of possibilities due to the colour of their skin. While Breytenbach suffered from the law forbidding his marriage as a white man with a French-Vietnamese woman, there are little other oppressions he suffered under apartheid government on a daily basis, apart from his imprisonment. Also, as he is a poet in this corpus who has been raised in the Afrikaner culture, which has strong European roots, it is questionable if Visser's and Borgaza's critiques of Eurocentric ideas not being applicable on the postcolonial subject is true here. For his work as a white subject with Afrikaner roots who has spent a large part of his life in Europe, traditional trauma theory might be a lot less problematic to apply on him than on Small and Kamfer. Breytenbach complicates this matter even further by the complex identity he presents in his work. While choosing to live in exile, he also keeps writing his poetry in Afrikaans, even defending it in his poem "liefling, taal" (*Die singende hand* 443), even though he does admit in this poem the difficult relationship he has with the language because of its connections to the apartheid government:

dis 'n grusame ervaring
om in die grafte van voorouers te krap.
ek skaam my

hierdie taal, liefling
(...)
verdwyn omdat dit in die mond
van besoesdelde witmense was
al het dit ook iets van 'n heelal getong (443)

Breytenbach's bond with Afrikaans has clearly become tainted because of the language's history, even though he does acknowledge that as a creole language the range of identities connected with Afrikaans is much broader than the apartheid government might have presented ("al het dit ook iets van 'n heelal getong"). Nevertheless, in the beginning of the poem Breytenbach already explains that despite of this history, Afrikaans is still the language he needs to write his poetry in: "liefling, ek skryf vir jou in hierdie taal / want ek kan my nie daarvan loswoord nie" (443).

Another ambiguity in the presentation of his identity is in the title of his prison memoirs *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*. Using 'albino' instead of 'white' questions whether Breytenbach even still identifies himself as white. It might even insinuate that Breytenbach does not think of himself as white but as black or coloured, claiming that it is just not visible because of the albinism. In this case he would clearly posit himself next to the communities he has tried to defend, even though at first sight he might not be counted as one of them. It can be argued that this way he puts himself in the tradition of Black Consciousness as articulated by Steve Biko, which according to Thengani N. Ngwenya could be summarized as: "Blackness does not merely denote skin pigmentation but is 'a reflection of a mental attitude'" (500). According to this definition it would not matter that much that Breytenbach would be perceived as white because he clearly supports the causes of Black Consciousness. However, within the Black Consciousness movement, we can also hear sounds that would put Breytenbach in a more difficult position. For example, Mongane Wally Serote specifically names English and Afrikaans languages of apartheid and concludes that this problematizes anything written or said in those languages (40).

Whether this insinuation by Breytenbach that he would actually be black can be seen as charming or appropriation is up to the coloured and black communities to judge, but it is interesting to compare it to the title of Antjie Krog's *Begging to be Black* (2009). Here Krog also complicates her relation to both whiteness and blackness, but by 'begging' for it, she puts herself in a more humble position than Breytenbach does in his title, where he claims his albinism.

Despite of this peculiar position Breytenbach will take within my corpus, I still chose to include him, primarily to diversify my selection. Because Small and Kamfer are both from coloured communities, Breytenbach as a white man would certainly show a new perspective. His own history of oppression through his imprisonment would meanwhile make for not just a "white man's perspective" but a perspective that has earned his right to speak on the subject as well. Thirdly, his complex, hermetic poetry differs so much from the more direct poetry written by Kamfer and Small that he would also be a strong addition on a more formal level.

As we have seen in this chapter, the application of trauma theory to works by South African poets can be problematic. Especially psychoanalysis' focus on the individual and the western experience of trauma makes it difficult to use it to analyse literature and poetry coming forth from the South African communities. Being aware of these difficulties already helps, but it is also important to keep looking for ways that might make it possible to adjust trauma theory to a postcolonial setting. Borzaga mentions some interesting solutions with her attention to communities and the different meaning of certain aspects in life in different communities, but close attention has to be paid to the balance between universalism and relativism, to make sure a theory is still general enough to be workable but also does justice to different groups.

In the next chapter, I will discuss two poems by each aforementioned poet. In my analyses of these poems I will look at how trauma is represented in these poems. These poems are not (all) what is traditionally considered trauma poetry, but they all include a representation of trauma that I will examine. To do this, I will not only pay attention to the subjects traditional trauma theory suggests, but I will try to take the suggestions by scholars as Visser, Borzaga, and Craps and Buelens into account and look at subject that might be relevant for the poets discussed. This can be themes like their own socio-political context, use of language, certain themes and references to their own communities. This way, I want to show the added value of a more intersectional, postcolonial, context-sensitive analysis instead of the use of traditional trauma theory to analyse representations of trauma.

5. Analysis

In this chapter, I will discuss two poems of each of the previously mentioned poets.⁷ As mentioned before, it can be debatable whether all these poems can be considered to be traditional trauma literature. This selection focusses on how these poems reflect on the trauma of apartheid. Because this thesis questions the link between traditional trauma theory and the south African subject, it might be more interesting not to make a traditional choice in poetry as well. Therefore the selected poems might not all be considered traditional trauma literature.

I will discuss the poems per authors, and the authors in chronological order. Each section, I will discuss several elements, whether motivated by more traditional approaches or more postcolonial ones, about how trauma is represented within this poem.

“Vryheid” and “What about de lô?” by Adam Small

In 1962 Adam Small published his book of poetry *Kitaar my kruis*, which features the poem “Vryheid,” an anti-apartheid poem that echoes Rosa Parks’ bus protest of 1955. This quite long and narrative poem (around six pages, depending on the edition), consists of two parts. The first part tells us of the lyrical subject going out for a day at the sea with his pregnant wife. They appear to be happy but darkness is lurking. While they are trying to hold on to their happiness, reality bursts in, introduced by the last lines of the first part: “maar hierdie skoonheid heel nie, maak net siek / en hierdie oomblik lieg!” (47).

The second part of the poem is the extensive description of a traumatic moment. When they are taking the bus back to Wynberg, the part where coloured people are allowed to sit is full. In the compartment for white people, eight places are still available and the lyrical subject asks the driver whether his wife, six months pregnant, is allowed to sit. She is denied this, and has to stand the whole seven-mile trip.

Characteristic of this poem is the frequent use of repetition, taking the form of flashbacks, especially in the second part. These moments of repetition seem to underline the fixation of the trauma, the memory of the moment settling in the subject’s brain even when they are not directly relevant to the trauma, as the repetition of the view from the bus: “en deur die ruite / kom die sonskyn oor die akkerbome buite - / deel van die droewe hel van hierdie rit” (47, 49). This view is not relevant for the trauma itself, but the peacefulness of the view, linked to the nice memory of the day at the beach, forms a strong contrast with the situation of the subject: cramped into a bus that

⁷ Each of the poems can be found in its entirety in the appendix at the end of this thesis.

denies his humanity. The other cases of repetition are more directly related to the trauma: the moment that the subject asks the driver if his wife is allowed to sit (47, 48) and the conversation he has with his wife where she comforts him:

dit pyn, sê sy, maar ons moet liefhê, ons hét lief, bedaar
ek antwoord haar
ek antwoord met my oë: dit is waar
ek antwoord: ons móét liefhê, ons hét lief, maar dit is swaar... (48, paraphrased in 50)

These repetitions make the poem more than just a narrative. Returning to these moments distorts the linearity of time, focussing both the subject's and the reader's attention on the trauma, not just telling a story, relating to a situation, but underlining the emotional impact of the moment. This is worked out even more when at the end of the poem the subject takes his story one step further: it is not just about his wife anymore but about the oppression of all non-white people every day:

die bus ruk
en 'n vrou ses maande swanger staan
die hele lewe ruk en ons almal wat nie wit is nie ons staan
sy staan vir ses, vir sewe myl, sy staan
ons almal staan, staan meer as ses en meer as sewe myl,
staan vir 'n hele lewe
en agt sitplekke oop, maar sy moet staan (50)⁸

The narrative starts to dissolve here into an argument against the apartheid system as a whole, portraying the injustice that is done to people every day, just pointing it out through the heightened injustice of it being done to a pregnant woman.

Further on in *Kitaar my kruis*, one encounters the poem "What about de lô?", one of Small's most famous poems. Just as "Vryheid" this is a poem of considerable length, around four pages, telling in a very minimalistic way the story of Diana and Martin, a white girl and a coloured boy who fall in love but have to go to jail because the apartheid government forbids their relationship. This leads to both of them committing suicide, leaving their families behind in devastation. This poem is even stronger than "Vryheid" characterized by the amount of repetition, especially with phrases that

⁸ Note here the ambiguity that is possible within Afrikaans: as verbs do not conjugate with first, second or third persons, or with singular or plural, and the words for "she" and "they" are the same, there is no difference between "she stands" and "they stand".

include the word “lô”. Continuously, the different families try to warn the two lovers of the laws that are in place, followed by Martin and Diana who question the justness of those laws:

sê Diana se mense
what abou’ de lô
sê Martin se mense
what abou’ de lô
sê almal die mense
what abou’ de lô

sê Martin sê Diana
watte’ lô
God’s lô
man’s lô
devil’s lô
watte’ lô

sê die mense net
de lô
de lô
de lô
de lô
what abou’ de lô
what abou’ de lô (59-60)

Even though the repetition in this poem is very strong, it hardly seems to have the same function as in “Vryheid.” Where in “Vryheid” the repetition seems to underline the fixation of the trauma, taking on the form of a flashback, in “What abou’ de lô?” the narrative is not being disrupted by the repetition. Instead it just shows the problem that Martin and Diana keep running into: the unjust law and people’s inability to look further than the law. The law becomes the evil antagonist in this story and thus again, this poem has a very strong moral story.

Whereas in “Vryheid” forgiveness played a very important role, that theme does not seem present in “What abou’ de lô?”. But where in “Vryheid” it was forgiveness that made the characters able to rise above the situation, in “What abou’ de lô?” Martin and Diana are not left to their own victimhood. They take their own life not to be subjected to this unjust law, and the way Small reflects

on this emphasizes their agency here. “Martin and Diana / died for de lô” (61). With this active phrasing, they are the ones holding agency. It was not the law who killed them, they decided to commit suicide themselves. Even though this is certainly being portrayed as a very sad event, throughout the poem, Diana and Martin stay strong, defying characters who will not accept themselves to be labelled victims.

Both poems were published in the 1960s, so at the height of apartheid. In this period, one can say the traumatic event was still happening, as new unjust laws were implemented every year and the oppression was in full strength. Thus, it is not surprising that within these poems, there is no talk of healing yet: in the best case, there is talk of coping or dealing with the trauma through faith and solidarity. This differs from much of the work trauma theory is based on: as the main subject has for long been holocaust literature, and it was not exactly possible to publish a volume of poetry in a concentration camp, trauma literatures have often been published *after* the traumatizing event has taken place instead of while it was still happening. This has several consequences for how these kinds of poetry have to be approached. As Small wrote his work in the midst of the event, he writes from a very different position, especially because of the scope of the trauma. This is no small personal trauma, it is something that is happening to everyone around you for already a generation and as far as you know, there is no reason to think it will change. Hence, the way an author reflects on an event will be completely different: it is hard to have a good overview when you are in the midst of the storm and as the event is still going on, an issue like healing is out of the question. There is no chance of relief and no certain hope that it will one day be over.

This seems to be a way to explain Small’s focus on Christian themes. Of course faith was important to him in general, but it is also a strong tool to keep hope and stay optimistic in a time when there is no rational reason to think things will get better. With the repeated “O God, U hoogste proef is nie die vuur maar die vernedering!” (50, 51), Small is able to give a meaning to the trauma that makes it understandable within his worldview: it is just a test by God. This way one could argue that Small defies Caruth’s statement that an important aspect of the trauma is that it cannot be fully known (6). It is through his religion that Small’s subject is able to give some kind of meaning to the event and thus create a way for himself to understand it. This does not seem to fix the trauma, but it does put it in a framework which is an important part of the subject’s way to handle his trauma.

With healing not yet being a possible function, one of the functions of this text seems to become the acknowledgement of the trauma. By speaking out on behalf of his community to say that this trauma exists, and by giving words to this trauma, Small helps his community acknowledge what is happening to them and builds a strong sense of solidarity, especially by using lines as “álle mense wat nie wit is nie” and “ons almal staan” (50). Even though both poems are (partly) about the experience of coloured people (“agter waar ons die *bruines* sit, mág sit” (47), “Martin was ‘n *bryn*

boy,” (59), my emphasis), Small broadens his focus to non-white people in general, either by specifically naming it as in “Vryheid” or by focussing on the law as in “What about’ de lô?”. But this is not the only tool he uses to strengthen the community: the use of Kaaps Afrikaans is also important here. Whereas the coloured community in the Cape area is highly diverse, one of the things that bind a large group of people is the use of the same language: not just Standaard Afrikaans, but Kaaps Afrikaans which is mostly spoken by the coloured people and is an important language in the township areas. With his use of Kaaps Afrikaans in “What about’ de lô”, Small both distances himself from the Standaard Afrikaans from the apartheid government and acknowledges the large group of speakers of the Cape dialect.

Important to note here is, that although these two poems by Small feature certain aspects that one can analyse through traditional trauma theory (repetition, flashbacks), a lot of the strength of the poem needs other ways of analysis to become more pronounced. Although the trauma is an important subject of the poem, Small’s poetry is not focussed on the healing of the trauma, but in the acknowledgement of it and wanting to work towards a situation in which the trauma would become irrelevant. In the midst of the struggle, he wants to show what these laws are doing to people to stop these traumas from even happening: healing is not even on the agenda yet. Important to him is first of all to build a community which is able to formulate what is happening to them, not only for the acknowledgement but also to help them to better fight against it.

“ek het gedroom” and “(credo)” by Breyten Breytenbach

Breyten Breytenbach’s book of poetry *Voetskrif* contains a few nameless poems, amongst which one that I will henceforth address by its first line, “ek het gedroom”. The content of this poem seems to have a double narrative. The clearest, most obvious reading is that of a subject dreaming that they are imprisoned in a prison with white walls. It relates to their life in prison and their feeling of entrapment. At the end of the poem the subject wakes up and looks their betrayer in the eye. The second narrative, the clearest metaphor, is that of a (probably white) subject being trapped by apartheid legislation to only live in a white world, mingle with white people, etc. This is interesting to compare to Breytenbach’s approach to concepts like whiteness and blackness, as I discussed previously regarding the title of his prison memoirs, *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, where he distances himself from the label “white”. Further on in his memoirs he also claims that he knows what it is like to be black in a white country, saying that his insides are black (28). In “ek het gedroom”, this distancing is done more subtly: while not claiming blackness, he does express his discomfort with being identified as white and thus only allowed to move in white circles.

Within both of the narratives, trauma plays an important role, whether it is the trauma of apartheid, or the trauma of being imprisoned. One of the ways the trauma can be noted here is

through the physical reaction of the subject: “waar ligte suis / my harspan fluit” (19). A reaction to this overwhelming physical experience seems to be a kind of distancing or disassociation. Whereas in the second line the subject tells about his dream where he himself *is* in prison (“ek is in ‘n gevangenis van wit mure”(18)), later on in the dream he becomes a viewer of himself: “ek het my self: / gehurk in ‘n potjie sien kak”(19). By distancing himself the lyrical subject becomes his own viewer, being able to discuss his trauma without the same emotional impact. This is especially interesting if we compare it to the last line of the first stanza, where the subject becomes one with the traumatic experience: “ek is ingegroei in die wit van die tronk” (19). How do these two positions relate to each other? Is it the distanced subject concluding that his other “ek” has become one with the prison, or was the distancing an unsuccessful endeavour as the subject has nevertheless become part of the prison? It is important to note that within the context of Breytenbach’s work, different identities play an important role and a split subject would thematically fit his work as one can also see in Kai Wiegandt’s analysis of the poem “there is life” (438). Here he says that

It [“I”], could be spoken by the prisoner, who has taken off on the wings of imagination and does not feel imprisoned anymore; but [...] it could also be spoken by the warder looking over Breytenbach’s shoulder, because he, too, depends on fantasy bordering on madness to survive in the monochromatic world of the prison. (438)

A play with different identities of the subject and other characters around him is a feature that we often see in Breytenbach’s poetry.

From the perspective of trauma I also want to look at the embedding of the narrative in this poem. Everything that is mentioned in the first stanza is embedded within the dream. In the second and last stanza the dream is closed off by the subject waking up. However, as the first thing the waking subject sees are the eyes of his betrayer, it seems that the dream world of the first stanza might not be as unreal as a dream state suggests. Embedding the trauma within a dream is also a way for the subject to distance themselves from their trauma, to create another world for the trauma as to separate their own reality from that of the trauma. What is notable here, is that this strategy does not keep up for the whole of the poem: in the last two lines, when the subject wakes up, the dream world and reality merge again and an escape from the world of the trauma thus becomes impossible.

The second poem by Breytenbach that I want to discuss, “(credo)” is the longest and possibly most complex poem discussed in this thesis. It consists of fourteen stanzas with a large amount of those stanzas being descriptions of several places around the world that the subject has seen. For a

trauma based analysis these stanzas have little more function than to posit the subject as a global citizen with a lot of life experience, so this will also be the extent to which I will discuss these stanzas.

The first two stanzas and the last four however are more reflexive with the subject often questioning themselves:

my naam
jy wat nou hier lees
is nie van belang nie
want dit gaan ook polstik verby en niks bly oor (110)

In one of the later stanzas it is even being said “ek weet daar is nie ‘n ek nie” (112). The subject that is presented is under constant change and thus becomes undefineable. Breytenbach links this to several notions from Zen Buddhism, which plays a major role in his poetry.

die lewe is annica want niks hou stand
en gaan verby
die lewe is dukkha want oral is angs en pyn
die as is onvolwaak en die lewenswiel loop skeef
die lewe is anatta want niks is alleen en apart nie
niks bevat alles en niks het substansie
maar dis nog alles niks of reeds alles (112)

Annica (impermanence), dukkha (suffering) and anatta (non-self) are here the three marks of existence, an important part of Buddhist belief. A direct reference to apartheid can be found here in the fifth line, where the Zen Buddhist ideas of what life is are directly opposed to “apart”.

In “(credo)”, Breytenbach has taken a lot of time to clearly construct the subject as someone who cannot be defined and is able to relate to situations all over the world. In this fluidity of the subject one can also see a lot of focus on the concept of freedom: being able to move to different places, interact with different people and concepts, and the freedom not to be defined or labeled. This contrasts with the two last stanzas, when the subject turns out to have lost its freedom and is imprisoned:

ek
jy wat nou hier lees
is niks

is net 'n toevallige nommer in 'n sel (112)

This complex character has suddenly been reduced to merely a number, one of the prisoners instead of an individual: the traumatic experience and the same as in “ek het gedroom”. However, whereas “ek het gedroom” had a more pessimistic approach, these lines are followed by some more hopeful – or at least idealistic:

maar met my koue honderd jaar
is ek nog nie oud nie
en voordat dit alles voltrek en soos damp is
wil ek my hart aan sy polstakke voel lig
want ek deel 'n droom
van vryheid van gelykheid van broederskap van vrede
en sodoende van geregtigheid

en hoe sal ek sonder die waarheid kan lewe? (113)

Here we might see the result of Breytenbach’s special position regarding the apartheid trauma: contrary to for non-white South Africans, his trauma is not the result of something that just *happened* to him. It is the result of his conscious choice leave his safe home in France, far away from the apartheid government and regulations, and join the underground resistance. Whereas non-whites in South Africa suffered under apartheid either way, whether they resisted it or not, Breytenbach’s exile to France put him in a position where he encountered relatively little oppression from the apartheid government (apart from some visa issues). His trauma being the result of a conscious risk he took makes it possible for him to keep his eyes on the idealistic ball: his suffering only strengthens him in those ideals. The subject thus clutches to his ideology as a lifeline because “hoe sal ek sonder die waarheid kan lewe?”

In both poems by Breytenbach, it is notable that the subjects transcend communities (in contrast to Small, who tries to create communities). They are global citizens or they transcend whiteness, thus making it possible for the subjects to evade labels like “South African,” “Afrikaner” or “white”. This way, the poems not only reject the apartheid system, but also offer an alternative. It shows that identity can be found in things other than nationality, ethnicity or race, especially by being juxtaposed to the traumatic experiences of having your identity taken away. Where the subject in prison is reduced to a number or a name, in “(credo)” this trauma is resisted by creating an identity based on experiences and fluidity instead of on labels like nationality or ethnicity. It can

however be questioned to what extent this experience would also be available to Small and Kamfer. Even though Small was able to spend some time at the universities of London and Oxford, and Kamfer has been travelling to perform on international festivals since her debut, they will not have had the same privileged experience while travelling as Breytenbach has had. It can therefore be argued that this imagination of cosmopolitanism is more available to Breytenbach than to the other poets.

The importance of the influence of Zen Buddhism on Breytenbach's work can hardly be overestimated, as can already be seen if one only looks at the titles his books. Breytenbach's first book of poetry, *Die Ysterkoei moet sweet* (1964) is a reference to the Zen Buddhist saying "To be able to trample the great Nothing the Iron Cow will have to sweat", and his latest book *Op weg na kû* (2019) refers to the Zen concept of kû, nothingness (Coetzee 37). One important aspect of Zen Buddhism within Breytenbach's poetry is that within this philosophy, good and evil exist next to each other, non-hierarchical. Both are a part of life and of what makes a person who they are. Where in traditional trauma theory there is a lot of focus on the process of healing from a trauma, this is not an issue when using a Zen Buddhist approach to trauma: the experiences of the trauma are incorporated into the person and are thus not something that should be left behind. The trauma simply exists next to other parts of life (Humphreys 8).

The way an individual is presented in his poetry is also strongly influenced by this. I have already pointed out the fluidity of the lyrical subject, and this, together with quotes like "ek weet daar is nie 'n ek nie," connects to the undefineability of the self within Buddhism (112). In his analysis of Breytenbach's use of Zen Buddhism in his prison works, Andrew Nash also points out that "[t]here is no self to turn back to, in the sense of a fixed and stable identity unchanged by the projects it undertakes" (23). Everything the subject goes through will change it, and this makes for a different reflection on the trauma as well. If a person is under constant change anyway, the trauma takes on a more neutral stance as well: of course the traumatic event can still be harmful but as a person is always changing anyway it does not necessarily have to be a bad thing that a trauma causes change as well, as that is just part of life. This takes power away from the trauma. Whereas Small did this through building a community (e.g. you cannot break me, because I am part of a community), Breytenbach refuses the power of the trauma by showing a fluid individual (you cannot change me, because I am changing regardless of you).

"Noudat slapende honde" en "vergewe my maar ek is Afrikaans" by Ronelda S. Kamfer

As Kamfer was born in 1981, she only lived under official apartheid in her youngest years. Her work can thus be seen as post-transitional. When talking about the term "post-transitional," Ronit Frenkel already notes that it is "certainly not without its problems":

It is, and is not, a temporal marker, as it does refer to something moving but does not claim that the issues involved in the transition have been resolved. As a referent it cannot but highlight the passage of time that has passed since South Africa's transition into a democracy, yet it also points to the period before and after this formal transition as an unbounded period and discourse. The term "post-transitional" can be read in much the same way as the term "post-feminist," with its attendant conceptual shifts that do not necessarily imply that the ideals of feminism have been attained and are now to be taken for granted. (27)

This way, post-transitionality does not imply that the themes of before the transition do not still play a major role in post-transitional literature. On the contrary, it is exactly this move from a previous period (that is still in some way present) to a new period that characterizes it.

This can be clearly seen in the title poem of her first book of poetry, *Noudat slapende honde* (2008). Here the relationship between the subject's present day and her past is investigated. The representation of the present day of the subject is characterized by a strong, independent position, as can be seen by lines like "nou's ek 'n fokken hero" (15). Despite this new identity as a "fokken hero," is a "profound resentment and unease about the way in which she has suddenly become acceptable and is expected to ignore her past" (Viljoen, "Of Chisels and Jackhammers" 21). Her strong current position does not mean the traumatic past has been let go. On the contrary, it is now when the subject has acquired this strength that the past keeps coming back to her:

Noudat slapende honde wakker is
en ek my helde in rock n roll en gangsta-rap gevind het
jaag die meid my nog steeds soos 'n skadu

Noudat ek Afrikaans praat
en ek die labels van my klere afgeknip het
soek die verlede my nog steeds in die reën

Noudat ek oud genoeg is om te verstaan
en te jonk is om te onthou
Nou! Word ek eers remind (15)

It is exactly the new position of the subject that makes it notable that the past still haunts them. And it is specifically haunting, because this coming back of the past is described almost like a hunt (“*jaag die meid*,” “*soek die verlede*,” emphasis mine). This is a strong example of the influence the apartheid trauma still has on current society. Simply by abolishing the apartheid system, the trauma is not healed but still influences people in their daily lives, no matter how young they might have been under apartheid. On the contrary, it is the freedom that is experienced nowadays that seems to make the trauma even stronger. As Ana Miller has also noted regarding the novel *Bitter Fruit* (2003) by Achmar Dangor, ““insidious” traumas pervade contemporary (non-white) South African experiences” (156). Just as for *Bitter Fruit*, it can be said for the poetry of Kamfer that

[it] explores the structural and economical legacies that the apartheid past has bequeathed to the post-apartheid present, which manifests itself in the characters’ pessimism in regards to the “new” South Africa. There is the sense that apartheid racial categorizations continue to haunt the present, as we see in the colored characters’ internalization of the racial. (Miller 156)

It is only in the calm of freedom and in their strong new position that the subject is able to reflect on their past and see what actually happened to them. The effect of this is so strong that in the last stanza, we even see some desire back to the traumatizing past:

Maar saans
net voor ek gaan slaap
smee ek die donkerte
om my weer bang te maak (15)

It is the opposition between her new strong position and the fear at night that undermines the subject. The strength of the trauma makes it almost impossible for them to function within this new world, so a desire for the time when there actually was something to fear feels more familiar. The haunting of the trauma while there is nothing to fear anymore feels too unnatural and is something the subject seems to be having trouble with to deal with, maybe “indicating [their] discomfort with the new system” (Miller 156). Before claiming too easily that this would imply a desire for the time of apartheid, it is interesting to compare the desire expressed in this stanza to the nostalgia as pronounced by Jacob Dlamini in his book *Native Nostalgia* (2009). Here he examines a sentiment that is felt by many black and coloured South Africans but that is often problematized: having happy memories that happen to take place in the apartheid era, and thus experiencing nostalgia for that

time. He emphasizes that nostalgia for the apartheid era is *not* the same as justifying anything that happened during that time:

It does not have to be a hankering after the past and a rejection of the present and the future. There is a way to be nostalgic about the past without forgetting that the struggle against apartheid was just. In fact, to be nostalgic is to remember the social orders and networks of solidarity that made the struggle possible in the first place. (17)

He also claims that “[t]o be nostalgic for a life lived under apartheid is not to yearn for the depravity visited on South Africa by the likes of Mamasela. It is to yearn, instead, for order in an uncertain world” (14). When we connect this to the last stanza of “Noudat slapende honde,” we can imagine that the subject, with all the new changes going on and all the new positions they have to take, sometimes longs for a time when things might have been clearer.

In the poem “vergewe my maar ek is Afrikaans” (53), a solution is proposed instead of nostalgia. Although the first two words of the poem (“liewe ooms”) suggest a forgiving stance, the subject takes on a radical stance of reclaiming her identity in the course of the poem (53).⁹ The first part of the poem clearly relates to the trauma of the subject which causes a fear of the Afrikaner Boere. This comes to expression through a very physical reaction:

maar as ek het gehoor van die Boere
het my hart vinnig begin klop
fyn sweetdruppels het op my bolip
begin uitslaan
my kop het skuins gekantel
my keel het droog geword
en ek wou hardloop
vinnig en vinniger en vinnigste
vinniger as Frankie Fredericks (53)

When talk of the Boere comes up, the subject shows clear features of trauma and a panic attack: a raised heartbeat, sweating, a dry throat. By ending the next stanza with “but as with every childhood fear / adulthood changes nothing,” the subject shows that this reaction is still something that occurs

⁹ It is important here to note that the TRC made for a large emphasis on forgiveness in South African discours. Taking on a forgiving stance or not, can thus easily be seen as a connection to or rejecting of this discours.

(53). The heaviness of the childhood trauma has not disappeared with apartheid abolishment or just by growing up, it is still something that they have to deal with.

From the fifth stanza on a strong solution is presented: to heal through reclaiming. As discussed before, white Afrikaners and many coloured people share the same language. The subject claims to have discovered the secret to healing from the trauma the Afrikaners caused them: reclaiming parts of their culture as her own as well (53).

ek praat julle taal
ek eet julle kos
ek bly in julle vaderland
ek drink julle wyn
ek sing julle musiek
en liewe ooms, ek, ja ek, ek vry met julle seuns (55)

By talking (and publishing) in Afrikaans, the subject (and Kamfer herself) are reclaiming a part of their culture that has become associated with their oppression, but that nevertheless are part of the culture of many coloured people as well. But Kamfer rightly points out that it is about more than language: they share the same culinary traditions, the same land and the wine industry has had a lot of influence in the Cape province providing jobs for both white and non-white people. Afrikaans music is sung by both groups and with the abolishment of apartheid laws relations between both groups have become legal and are apparently something the subject takes part in as well. This reclaiming undermines the othering that benefitted the Afrikaners and strengthens the subjects own position within the new postapartheid society.

Kamfer poses us for an difficult question, namely which trauma it is that is represented. Of course, Kamfer has lived through official apartheid in her youth, but never as an adult. Even though she will have memories of living under apartheid as a child and a young teen, that is still different from the adult experience. However, it has also been often said that even though apartheid has officially been abolished, many of the structures of inequality are still in place. The question thus becomes: is the trauma presented in Kamfer's poetry a first-hand trauma because she still experiences the traumatic remains of apartheid nowadays, or is it a case of some kind of postmemory because it relates to a trauma she never experienced as an adult. And when it is a case of postmemory, it can be a question whether that would be according to the definition by Marianne Hirsch (ergo, a memory that works transgenerational) or according to Ernst van Alphen's critique on Hirsch (where postmemory becomes the trauma of living and dealing with a traumatized generation). Kamfer thus becomes a liminal writer, writing on the edge of memory and postmemory. She does

have her own apartheid memories, whether it is from before the abolishment of legal apartheid or the remains of apartheid afterwards, but I would claim that these memories, her own trauma, are enhanced by postmemory. It is the context of a highly traumatized society that makes for a different experience of her own trauma.

By showing that for the new generation, the trauma of apartheid is still very present, and in different ways than for previous generations, Kamfer evokes Rothberg's multidirectional memory. In this case too, the memory and experience of apartheid turns out to be under constant change and is something that will have to be addressed in society for a long time, as each group and each generation will have different associations with it and will need different ways of dealing with this trauma. Kamfer's own solution of reclaiming is also just one, personal solution. By formulating her poetry so personal ("*ek praat julle taal / ek eet julle kos / ek bly in julle vaderland / ek drink julle wyn / ek sing julle musiek / en liewe ooms, ek, ja ek, ek vry met julle seuns*" (55), emphasis mine), she shows this just to be her own way of dealing with the trauma and never claims it to be a general solution to the problem.

With Small and Breytenbach, healing was not yet a point of discussion. With Kamfer, writing after the abolishment of apartheid, it does become an important theme. However, she does not comply to the dominant discourse of forgiveness: the trauma is too big to disappear through forgiveness and something more is needed. For Kamfer, this can be found in reclaiming her identity as a coloured, Afrikaans speaking woman.

6. Conclusion

At the start of this thesis, I asked to what extent the (often Eurocentric) trauma studies can be applied to Afrikaans poetry that deals with trauma. As seen in the analytical chapter, it is clear that certain aspects of traditional trauma studies are indeed problematic when applied to this kind of poetry. Features of traditional trauma literature were not always present, like the aporetic dictum or a disturbance of the linear time line, but more importantly, psychoanalysis' focus on the individual experience soon became quite irrelevant because of the focus on community, especially within the poetry of Small and Kamfer. Their poetry seldom just describes a personal experience, but is often put in a broader context of the experience of coloured people in general. With all authors, identity becomes an important subject, partly because that is part of what the trauma of apartheid has tried to take away. Small finds his identity in the coloured and Christian community, blurring the individual experience with the daily experience of the people around him. Breytenbach creates an identity so fluid that life in prison will not be able to get a grip on it. Kamfer reclaims her identity by consciously choosing for Afrikaans and other cultural aspects that have been claimed by the oppressors.

This is why amongst others the suggestions by Visser, Craps and Buelens seem very productive for the analysis of this poetry. Their focus on community instead of individual experience seems much better suited to deal with a national trauma such as apartheid. The analysis of what a poem does with the subject of community also turned out to be very productive when looking at the discussed poems: both Kamfer and Small have the building of a community as an important priority, and with Breytenbach it is the deconstruction of the white community that plays a large role in his dealings with the trauma.

Another very useful concept turns out to be that of Rothberg about multidirectional memory. It acknowledges the presence of the trauma in society but also that this experience of the trauma is under constant change (Rothberg 3). Of all three authors, this becomes most clear when looking at the work of Kamfer, who clearly states that the trauma of apartheid is not over yet and that the new generation is looking for a way to deal with this trauma over and over again. There is no fixed solution presented, because the trauma has come forth from the interaction between different groups in society: a new generation will be different, but still formed by the older generation. It will take time and different approaches to work through this. This need for different approaches also becomes clear in the comparison between how Small and Breytenbach try to take power away from the trauma. Whereas Small focusses on building a community, Breytenbach has a very different approach to identity and thus creates a fluid and cosmopolitan subject.

Where trauma theory traditionally has an emphasis on victimhood, within all three of the discussed authors there seems to be a stress on agency. Victimhood is not something that is denied, but also something very little attention is being paid to. Agency and the control the subject has over its own life is something that keeps being emphasized. With Small, in “Vryheid” we can see this through Christian ideals of forgiveness and in “What about de lô?” by the agency Martin and Diana show through their suicide: the law did not kill them, but they “died for de lô” (61). In Breytenbach it is the construction of one's own identity and the inability of someone else to influence the change in one's identity that lets the subject keep its own agency. Kamfer's plea for agency might be the strongest: by explicitly advocating to reclaim aspects of the Afrikaans identity, she hands out very specific tools for how to take a position of agency when the trauma of apartheid is lurking in the back.

For the title of this thesis, I have chosen the phrase from Small's “What about de lô?”, not only for my own personal reasons (as one can read in my introduction), but also because it is the nonchalance that radiates from this sentence that seems to characterize many of the poems discussed. The optimism that speaks from the different possibilities of dealing with trauma that are proposed in these poems are an act of defiance against the history of apartheid. With the phrase “what about de lô?”, Martin and Diana shrug apartheid off their shoulders, questioning its every being and emphasizing to only things that really matter: their love and their human identity. It is this need to claim one's own identity that is explored by Small, Breytenbach and Kamfer.

Although Visser claimed there is “no consensus about the question whether trauma theory can be effectively “postcolonialized”,” we can conclude that the suggestions that have been made by several scholars for a new approach seem highly productive (270). The gaps that have been left by the traditional, more Eurocentric trauma theory are effectively filled by theories that have more focus on interpretation with room for community building and the construction of identities.

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Appendix 1

Selection of poems, with numbered stanzas

“Vryheid”

Adam Small

- [1] Die see ruk teen die rotse by Houtbaai
ons loop en droom en alikruikels pluk
en nes ons harte om mekaar verruk
draai ook die meeuwe om ons koppe, alles draai
in een groot sonnige maling van
- [2] geluk?
- [3] ons glimlach, maar ek weet ons wonder, elk banger
as die ander oor die ongebore klein verlanger
na die vryheid, sy my vrou ses maande swanger
sy en ek; ons druk mekaar se hande styf en glimlach wranger
- [4] ons weet
geluk behoort te wees bloot om die lewe
te lowe soos die oomblik dit weerspieël
in die flikkering van verhale op vis en krewes
op elke trots skuimdruppende klein kiel
van bootjies wat nou baai- en see-in wieg [p.46]
- [5] twee duikertjies glip glad vry in die diepe blou
en hoog oor Chapmanspiek
wiek vry
'n voëlpaar verby
hoog bo die bootjies wat hieronder wieg
- [6] maar hierdie skoonheid heel nie, maak net siek
en hierdie oomblik lieg!
- *
- [7] die leuen kry gestalte
toe ons die bus na Wynberg haal terug
die middag by die 15^e bushalte
- [8] ons klim die trap, die bus is agter vol
oorvol
agter waar ons die bruines sit, mág sit
kol-kol kom deur die ruite

die sonskyn oor die akkerbome buite –
deel van die droewe hel van hierdie rit

[9] agt sitplekke is oop voor in die bus
vir blankes net
en 'n swanger vrou moet staan, sy's bruin, nie wit
en deur die ruite
kom die sonskyn oor die akkerbome buite –
deel van die droewe hel van hierdie rit

[10] ek vra die kondukteur mag sy maar sit...
my God, mag sy maar sit
mag sy maar sit! [p.47]

[11] maar watter voorreg is dit tog is jy nie wit
om te mag sit
God ja
net dit
net dit
om te mag sit...
dit maal
maal
maal
mal in my kop
sodat ek siek en mislik voel en naar
ek kyk na haar, my vrou, ek kyk na haar
en God, daar in haar oë is weer die verhaal
waarvan die moontlikheid hier onverklaarbaar
steeds bly:

[12] dit pyn, sê sy, maar ons moet liefhê, ons hét lief, bedaar!
ek antwoord haar
ek antwoord met my oë: dit is waar
ek antwoord: ons móét liefê, ons hét lief, maar dit is swaar...

[13] ek vra die kondukteur mag sy maar sit
hy skud die kop
en wys die vinger na die bord, die welbekende bord:
vir blankes net –
vir niet-blankes word vreugde opgeskort
steeds deur die bord- [p.48]
en 'n vrou ses maande swanger mag nie sit
en deur die ruite
kom die sonskyn oor die akkerbome buite –
deel van die droewe hel van hierdie rit

- [14] ons ry
 duisel ek dan?
 sien ek nou weer die vrye bloue ruim
 sien ek nou weer die meeuwe hoe hulle vlieg
 so dromend dralend
 ruik ek die soureuk van die wind
 sien ek die vissersbootjies kleurryk see-in wieg
 hoor ek die see breek teen die rotse en bruis tot skuim
 sien ek nou regtig weer die see, hoor ek die see
 proe ek, ruik ek, voel ek nou regtig weer die see
 die see?
 nee!
 nee!
 ek sien
 ek hoor
 ek proe
 ek ruik
 ek voel –
 en moet dit doen, doen as my hele doel –
 my eie skreeu om vryheid!
- [15] vryheid!
 vryheid!
 dié van my vrou en ongebore kind
 van álle vroue [p.49]
 álle kinders
 álle mense wat nie wit is nie
 die bus ruk
 en 'n vrou ses maande swanger staan,
 die hele lewe ruk –
 is dit vir ons nie-blanke mense dan net waan
 geluk?
- [16] die bus ruk
 en 'n vrou ses maande swanger staan
 die hele lewe ruk en ons almal wat nie wit is nie ons staan
 sy staan vir ses, vir sewe myl, sy staan
 ons almal staan, staan meer as ses en meer as sewe myl,
 staan vir 'n hele lewe
 en agt sitplekke oop, maar sy moet staan
- [17] o God, U hoogste proef is nie die vuur maar die vernedering!
 hoor ek die see sing, sing
 hoor ek die meeuwe sing?

nee!
nee!
ek hoor die vryheid
ja die vryheid sing!
want ek sien weer in jou oë die verhaal
en ek soos jy verstaan mos hierdie taal:
dit pyn, sê jy, maar ons moet liefhê, on hét lief
en dit behoort aan óns
aan óns [p.50]

[18] op elke rit soos dié
met elke ruk van bus of lewe
die geluk!

[19] o God, U hoogste proef is nie die vuur maar die vernedering!
hoor al ons mense hoor
en hoor jyself o hart
Gods hoogste proef is nie die vuur maar die vernedering!
hoor alle vroue, alle kinders, hoor my kind, hoor goed
hoor goed
Gods hoogste proef is nie die vuur maar die vernedering! [p.51]

What abou' de lô?

Adam Small

[1] Diana was 'n wit nôi
Martin was 'n bryn boy

[2] dey fell in love
dey fell in love
dey fell in love

[3] sê Diana se mense
what abou' de lô
sê Martin se mense
what abou' de lô
sê almal die mense
what abou' de lô

[4] sê Martin sê Diana
watte' lô
God's lô
man's lô
devil's lô
watte' lô

- [5] sê die mense net
de lô
de lô
de lô
de lô [p.59]
what abou' de lô
what abou' de lô
- [6] Diana was 'n wit nôï
Martin was 'n bryn boy
- [7] dey go to jail
dey go to jail
dey go to jail
- [8] sê Diana se mense
we tol' you mos
sê Martin se mense
we tol' you mos
sê almal die mense
we tol' you mos
- [9] sê Martin sê Diana
what you tol'
what God tell
what man tell
what devil tell
what you tol'
- [10] sê die mense net
de lô
de lô
de lô
de lô
what abou' de lô [p.60]
what abou' de lô
- [11] Diana was 'n wit nôï
Martin was 'n bryn boy
- [12] Diana commit suicide
Martin commit suicide
Diana en Martin commit suicide

[13] sê Diana se mense
o God behoed
sê Martin se mense
o God behoed
sê almal die mense
o God behoed

[14] Martin en Diana
died for de lô
God's lô
man's lô
devil's lô
watte' lô

[15] sê die mense net
de lô
de lô
de lô
de lô
what abou' de lô
what abou' de lô [p.61]

"Ek het gedroom"

Breyten Breytenbach

[1] ek het gedroom:
ek is in 'n gevangenis van wit mure
waar niemand my ken nie waar stemme
in gange verdwaal waar ligte suis [p.18]

[2] my harspan fluit
ek het my self:
gehurk in 'n potjie sien kak die vlieë
kom met die somer in die nag
suis die ligte wit vlamme
ek het my naam:
op die lyste gesien hoe dit skuif
sonder dat iemand dit ontsyfer onthou
al dowwer deur die kringjare
ek is ingegroei in die wit van die tronk

[3] ek het ontwaak:
toe die Judasoog 'n skrik na my kyk [p.19]

(credo)

Breyten Breytenbach

-à la mémoire de Li Po, à l'honneur de Uys Krige,
Et pour la plaisir de mon pôte, Bert Schierbeek –

- [1] my naam
jy wat nou hier lees
is nie van belang nie
want dit gaan ook polstik verby en niks bly oor
- [2] ek het baie
ek het baie verloor
ek het al aan die einde van baie dinge gekom
eintlik het ek al genoeg gesien om my baard in te sluk
om my oë te mag sluit en onder die gras en grysheid te lê
in die vlammevuurherd van die aarde
- [3] ek het al die son met 'n goue môresnor bewerig sien buk
om die nagspieëlkoepel van die Pantheon te soen
en in Tanger hoe die kralende huisies
gestring aan hobbelsteë deurskynend blou word
in die laaste sanderige asem van die aand
- [4] in Honfleur het ek die wind se wit vinne gesien
en in Rijeka die blou geraamte van 'n esel in die see se tande
in Bergen dek die sneeu soos winterskaduwee die strate
en in Khartoem is die vliegveld 'n groot woestyn
vol drommedarisse wat stomp helikopters is [p.110]
- [5] in Berlijn het ek gekoring op 'n bierkellertisch geklim
om die *Internationale* te sing
in Mossamedes het ek krappe en stof geëet
met 'n mirage in die een oog en die ander vol Fata Morgana
in Dar op die terras van die New Africa Hotel
is die lemmetjiesap groen en vars
en nat en suur
in gentlemanglase vol suiker en ys
en in LM wat nou Maputo heet het die maan
se hart gebreek en snikkend in die hawe gesink
sodat die papajas die piri-piri hoender en die vis
na swael gesmaak het
- [6] ek het 'n walviskoei al branders sien maak
aan die Kus van die Dood

en hoe dolfyne hul beswering weef om die kiel van 'n boot
ek het 'n bok in die lug sien hang met die koeël
en die wêreld se vuur onder vliegtuigvlerke sien groei
ook 'n pelgrim langs die snelweg in sy vlammende motor verkool
en bloed op die landerye
by Verduin is die horison platter as 'n breintelegraaf
sonder heffinge of daling
en Venesië is 'n enorme campo santo op stelte
die verassing van 'n stad langs die heilige see

[7] oor die Hoëveld knetter die weerligflitse
soos God in die dorings trap
ek het Gargarin in sy spoetnik met 'n handspieëltjie
by die patryspoort
al flikkerende sien spoed oor die berge van die Boland
ek het al op broodkorsies onder brûe geslaap toe die hemel
'n flenterjas was
en in die Hilton van Rotterdam

[8] ek het ook vierdeklas gevaar in 'n boemelskip
verby die bruin mond van die Kongo
die tong vol woorde modder
en die Kanariese Eilande waar voëls eerbiedige baarde teel
en in 'n houttrein deur die nog bruiner nag oor die Spaanse vlaktes
waar kleinboere hul kaas en olywe en wyn met mens deel
en Guardia Civil hul siele van roes en karton
en op Formentera het ek met Lord Lewis en Jim
van Fonda Pépé se brandewyn geproe [p.111]

[9] ek het die armoede geil gesien floreer
en 'n reukwater poedel waffers baas blaf-alleen in sy Rolls-Royce
ek was al in malhuise en televisiestudios
ek het selfs by ambassadeurs aan tafel gesit en shine
al was my sokkies ook vol aartappels
dalk het 'n baron se tuinier my al langs sy neus gegroet
op 'n distansie

[10] ek het die eer gehad om vriendskap te beleef
en verraad het ek op fluisterende straat ontmoet
die aaier en die adder in die getuiebank
die horingmannetjies met die week Joedasoë
ek was intiem met mense wat selfmoord gepleeg het
deur 'n glimlag van rook en as
my hand het al loshand die Atlantis van 'n vrou verken
ek was meesal bankreupel en 'n paar keer bankrot

ek was al slim gewees en dikwels gelukkig dom
en ek weet daar is nie 'n ek nie

- [11] die lewe is annica want niks hou stand
en gaan verby
die lewe is dukkha want oral is angs en pyn
die as is onvolwaak en die lewenswiel loop skeef
die lewe is anatta want niks is alleen en apart nie
niks bevat alles en niks het substansie
maar dis nog alles niks of reeds alles
- [12] ek het al versonke in die self die dieptes probeer ledig
en gevind dat daar niks is wat geledig kon word nie
en dit toe geledig
die oog in die lemoen se ooghare is geskroei
ek het al gepoog om versies te versin
want dis slegs en alleen verby die grense van weet en verstaan
dat jy met daardie pen 'n vlak kan grawe
in die papier
ek het die sterwe uit my probeer dryf
so fluitswart soos 'n kanonkoeël deur die niet
- [13] ek
jy wat nou hier lees
is niks
is net 'n toevallige nommer in 'n sel
en 'n hik in die lugpyp [p.112]
of in die Groot Verseboek 'n opperste grap
en nou het ek die reent soos horlosies op die tronk
se dak hoor spring
maar met my koue honderd jaar
is ek nog nie oud nie
en voordat dit alles voltrek en soos damp is
wil ek my hart aan sy polstakke voel lig
want ek deel 'n droom
van vryheid van gelykheid van broederskap van vrede
en sodoende van geregtigheid
- [14] en hoe sal ek sonder die waarheid kan lewe? [p.113]

Noudat slapende honde

Ronelda S. Kamfer

- [1] Noudat slapende honde wakker is

en ek my helde in rock n roll en gangsta-rap gevind het
jaag die meid my nog steeds soos 'n skadu

- [2] Noudat ek Afrikaans praat
en ek die labels van my klere afgeknip het
soek die verlede my nog steeds in die reën
- [3] Noudat ek oud genoeg is om te verstaan
en te jonk is om te onthou
Nou! Word ek eers remind
- [4] Noudat ek net mense sien
en my tekort aan kuns en kultuur
my harregat maak het
nou's ek goed genoeg
om deel te wees van die stelsel
- [5] Noudat my ouers van my hou
en ek die Happy Hotnot-mentality
opgebom het
nou's ek 'n fokken hero
- [6] Maar saans
net voor ek gaan slaap
smeek ek die donkerte
om my weer bang te maak [p.15]

vergewe my maar ek is Afrikaans

Ronelda S. Kamfer

- [1] liewe ooms met creepy, lang grys baarde, lang sokkies
en julle wat dink kaki go wif eweryfing
- [2] ek was vir 'n baie lang tyd bang vir julle
baie bang
julle was die Boogie Man
dudes, ek kon gangfights handle
even Pagad het niks op julle gehad nie
- [3] maar as ek het gehoor van die Boere
het my hart vinnig begin klop
fyn sweetdruppels het op my bolip
begin uitslaan
my kop het skuins gekantel
my keel het droog geword

en ek wou hardloop
vinnig en vinniger en vinnigste
vinniger as Frankie Fredericks

- [4] lieuwe oom, hoe kon julle
 ek was net 'n kind
 daai was glad nie cool nie
 but as with every childhood fear
 adulthood changes nothing
- [5] maar ten minste kan ek julle nou sonder
 'n breakdown ignore
 en dit alles te danke aan
 VOORUITGANG
 yes, julle etters
 ek het die geheim ontdek [p.53]
- [6] ek praat julle taal
 ek eet julle kos
 ek bly in julle vaderland
 ek drink julle wyn
 ek sing julle musiek
 en lieuwe ooms, ek, ja ek, ek vry met julle seuns
- [7] so there,
 met 'n traan in my oog sluit ek af
 en quite vir Jabu Terre'Blanche,
 die bure se aangenome seuntjie:
 'check out my new shirt
 my mama bought
 at the korporasie in Elgin
 it's two-toned so it go wif eweryfing' [p.55]