

https://dspace.org/

Labor of love Remembering dismembered bodies in community research

Hlengiwe Ndhlovu

WILEY-BLACKWELL PUBLISHING LTD
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/43303
WOS

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Check for updates

Received: 15 November 2022 | Revised: 17 August 2023 | Accepted: 24 January 2024

DOI: 10.1111/gwao.13117

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

The Answer Lies in Our Humanity: Research and Methodologies that Facilitate Healing and Hope

Labor of love: Re-membering dismembered bodies in community research

Hlengiwe Ndlovu

Wits School of Governance, University of the Witwatersrand, Witwatersrand, South Africa

Correspondence
Hlengiwe Ndlovu.
Email: hlengiepn@gmail.com

Funding information
National Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences

Abstract

Ethnographic studies are practically invasive in nature in that they intrude into people's everyday experiences. It is therefore the duty of a researcher documenting experiences of women to pay attention to these forms of violence and undertake the labor of love that seeks to re-member women's bodies and their stories in ways that restore their dignity and contribute to healing. African feminists have encouraged us to employ research methods that are able to engage stories of trauma and survival that are not triggering, invasive and limited. Intersectional feminism offers a qualitative analytical framework that aims at identifying the interlocked layered systems of oppression that affect the marginalized in society (Yuval-Davis (2006). Similarly, in employing fragmented narrative as a methodology, there is a realization and acknowledgment of the superficiality of linear retelling as a mode of conveying psychological damage that exposes the relationship between silence, gesture and suffering in revisiting the site of trauma.

KEYWORDS
community research, dis-membering, re-membering, trauma, violence

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2024 The Authors. Gender, Work & Organization published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

> For the past 29 years, I have lived with this story, never related it to anyone… these are the things we never talk about… 'Clean up!' one policeman shouted, pushing a black refuse bag to me. I picked up pieces of his limbs, scattered all over, and packed them in a plastic bag… They left, until today… I have never told this story to anyone, but today I feel like a rock has been lifted off my shoulders. For the first time, I am going to sleep peacefully…
>
> (Life history, East London, 2017)

1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper is premised on the argument that women's bodies in their everyday lived experiences are constantly dismembered physically and/or figuratively, as they are constructed as the 'other.' The paper draws from 6 years (2014–2020) of ethnographic mapping of East London, one of the cities in the Eastern Province of South Africa, documenting life histories of Black women narrating their experiences of violence, trauma and survival during the apartheid era and post-the democratic transition. Employing intersectional feminism(s) and fragmented narratives as key methodologies, I argue that adopting these tools as methodological, ethical, and theoretical approaches in community research, becomes a labor of love that opens up space for the voices and experiences of womxn in ways that seek to re-member the already dis-membered bodies and experiences. Empathy and sensitivity therefore become a thread that runs through reading, understanding and (re)presentation of the experiences of women, allowing them to participate in re-membering their life stories in ways that avoid contributing to textual violence and furthering the process of dismembering.

It is important to note that feminist scholars have been reflecting on ways of doing research differently for decades (Sen & Grown, 2013; Soldatic & Grech, 2014). Notably, the work of feminists in organizational studies has explored the dynamic relationship between storytelling and solidarity, emphasizing storytelling as a powerful tool that promotes a sense of solidarity among members, creating connections between various struggles (Weatherall, 2020). Similarly, the work on care ethics emphasizes the importance of nurturing relationships, empathy, and concern for others as a critique of the traditional focus on abstract principles as it encourages an ethic of care that values interpersonal relationships and responsibilities (Tronto, 2020). While this work remains important in rethinking methodologies and ethics of doing research, this paper takes a collective and collaborative approach to the actual process of re-presenting the narratives of the stories of women. As shown later in the paper, the end product of the stories reproduced here are a negotiated version between participants and the researcher, where participants wrote their version of the story they were comfortable with. This paper reflects on both methodological and ethical practices of doing community research as a labor of love.

2 | METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

The opening statement is an excerpt from a life history documented during data collection for my doctoral thesis. It reflects some of the challenges encountered by researchers as we conduct fieldwork, especially working with stories of violence and trauma. The broader doctoral research project, and by extension on this paper, is guided by intersectional as methodological, ethical and analytical frameworks. As a methodological framework, intersectionality guides the use of more inclusive and comprehensive methodologies that encourages researchers to collect and analyze data that considers multiple realities and helps to avoid oversimplification of the experiences of marginalized groups (Bilge and Hill-Collins, 2016; Carastathis, 2014; Lykke, 2010). As an analytical framework, intersectionality offers a tool for comprehensive analysis of social structures and systems of power in ways that

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

encourage more nuanced ways of understanding how different forms of oppression and privilege interact to produce complex and often unique experiences of discrimination or advantage for individuals and groups (Hill Collins, 1990; Lorde, 1984; Tate, 2019). As an ethical framework, intersectionality takes a holistic approach to highlight the importance of addressing various forms of discrimination and inequality. It stresses the importance of advocating for social justice and equality across multiple dimensions of identity, thereby encouraging researchers to consider the broader context of structural inequalities that affect marginalized communities (Ahmed, 2020; Dill & Zambrana, 2020; Emejulu & Sobande, 2023). This approach was informed by a clash between traditional approaches to ethics of research as taught in my academic discipline of social sciences and sociology research methods in particular, and ways in which local communities engaged my research in ways that were meaningful to their everyday lived experiences.

When I started immersing myself in the lives of the participants, I realized that there was a clash between what I have been taught in social science methodologies and methods, and what was happening on the ground. I therefore had to unlearn some of the problematic approaches such as traditional ethnographies that are invasive, contributing to textual violence and reproducing silencing and erasure of the experiences of women and those at the margins of society. Reflecting on my positionality as a black womxn graduate researching my own underprivileged community, I had to open up space for relearning how local residents preferred to engage with my research. This meant that I had to forego some of the preconceived ideas and knowledges, not only about ethics, but methods as well as methodologies.

The broader doctoral study brought together analyses of thirty life histories of local historians, fifty-two interviews/conversations, seven focus group discussions, archival work and participant observation. In this paper I draw from three stories narrated as part of the life histories documented from womxn who shared their experiences during the fieldwork period (2014–2019). The stories of womxn presented on this paper have been selected because of Ndlovu (2020b) the specific themes that I intend to address in this paper. They speak to the intersection of methodologies and ethics as a labor of love in doing community research. The stories reproduced here were written by the women themselves and are part of a collective labor of love that negotiates textual violence, silencing and erasure, while paying sensitive attention to dis-membering of women's bodies. Writing on lesbian rape, a South African activist Zanele Muholi (2004) reminds us of how as researchers, we tend to collect stories of our participants and choose to present them in privileged spaces such as academic journals in ways that are suitable for us, while erasing their voices and visibility.

Throughout the paper, I explore and unpack experiences of marginalized womxn that sometimes intersect with experiences of violence and trauma. Assembling these stories told in private and making them public (re-membering), demands that I employ sensitive methodologies that pay attention to the histories of silencing and erasure of womxn's labor and contribution to knowledge and knowledge production (Ndlovu, 2021). This means balancing the inclusion of womxn in re-telling their stories while making sure that these very womxn are not exposed to further forms of violence and trauma, contributing to further dis-membering of their bodies and experiences.

Intersectional feminism(s) is a qualitative analytical framework that aims at identifying the interlocked layered systems of oppression that affect the marginalized in society (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It borrows from the work of Kimberley Crenshaw to analyze ways in which race, class and gender interact to shape Black womxn's employment experiences (Crenshaw, 1990). Intersectional feminism therefore aims to broaden the first wave of feminism that drew mostly from the experiences of white, middle class womxn. Kiguwa argues that while it has its roots in Black feminist critique, it

> …also highlighted the importance of other marginalised feminisms, such as black and African feminism that aims to engage and make visible the voices and experiences of women of colour. Such an approach engages differences between women not just as a speaking-back to western feminism, but rather as new and alternative ways of reimagining gender and ways of relating to patriarchal systems that can create new resistances (Kiguwa, 2019: 227).

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Thus, adopting this analytical framework allows one to exercise reflexivity and sensitivity in learning about, documenting and representing the experiences of womxn that I document and analyze in this paper. As noted in the introduction to this paper, ethnographic studies are practically invasive in their nature in that they intrude into people's everyday experiences. Intersectional feminism(s) as a methodological framework therefore opens up a space for the voices and experiences of womxn to tell their own stories and to become the narrators of their own experiences (Kiguwa, 2019). When I started transcribing and re-writing the stories of womxn that I present here as case studies, I was confronted with the challenges related to textual violence, that is, exercising power and authority over the stories that were shared with me. This forced me to reflect on the power dynamics between the participants and myself as a researcher and to question the meaning of taking complete ownership of the project. The concept of local histories employed here, is born out of critical reflections that led to inviting womxn as co-authors of their life histories. It is from this analytical lens from which I borrow the idea of local historians as part of methodological intervention to acknowledge womxn's agency in shaping the narratives of their own histories.

It is important to note that as feminist approaches follow different strands, they sometimes clash with other ideas and views held by other womxn. Sylvia Tamale (2008) encourages us not to view African cultures as anti-progressive; instead, we should explore opportunities presented by different cultures in contributing to womxn empowerment. These methods that accommodate cultural diversity have been employed by womxn scholars who prefer womanist approaches to understanding experiences of womxn in particular (Motsemme, 2011; Walker, 1983). In light of these insights, intersectionality as a guiding methodological and ethical approach to reading experiences of the marginalized womxn accommodates the diversity of the views shared and how they have been subjectively framed by the local historians. Understanding of subjective experiences without imposing my culture and political views become important in reconciling experiences of radical feminists and those of womxn who emphasized their cultural biases and how these shape their everyday experience of the world.

The exercise of assembling and re-telling the stories presented as case studies on this paper, draws from the fragmented narrative methodology. In fragmentation methodology, there is a realization and acknowledgement of the superficiality of linear retelling as a mode of conveying psychological damage (Samuelson, 2007). Annette Markham (2005) draws our attention to the importance of the fragmented narrative methodology not only as a way of making sense of stories narrated by others, but also as a way in which we as researchers make sense of the whole data collection process, analysis, and presentation of the findings. She argues that:

> It is vital to call attention to fragmentation or hypertext logic in methodology and writing, even as these types of accounts become more and more familiar in our journals. Individual sense-making processes, dyadic and group relationships, and that which we call 'knowledge' are increasingly composed of nonlinear sound bites, transient connections, truncated texts, hyperlinked cognitive processing, multi-mediated understandings of what is real and meaningful. Our taken-for-granted methods of collecting and analysing data in these environments and representing culture in our scholarly work can only benefit from interrogation and reconsideration of how we derive and constitute the picture of social life we present to our colleagues and public. Attention to the way fragmented discourse functions helps us not only understand how people are experiencing everyday life but also, as scholars, explore new ways of making sense of social life and expressing knowledge (Markham, 2005: 815).

Adopting intersectionality as a methodological and ethical approach, and paying attention to the specificities and sensitivity of fragmented narratives allows the researcher to reflect on the meanings associated with 'dis-membering' and 're-membering' (of womxn's bodies and their everyday experiences) (Samuelson, 2007). Similarly, in assembling the stories of womxn, I had to constantly reflect on their everyday lived experiences as I encountered their world through their narratives. In re-telling and re-assembling the stories of our participants as researchers,

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

there is a need to ensure that we do not participate in further dismembering their bodies. The end result of the stories that appear as case studies in this paper is a negotiated position of representation where womxn participated in rewriting their stories in ways they preferred them to be retold, while making sure that they are not being exposed to further danger. For the researcher, this is a labor of love that contributes to building and protecting human dignity in the process of conducting research.

3 | THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

The works of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000) make it possible to rethink questions of representation of womxn's experiences in this paper. These two books demonstrate that telling stories of violence and trauma is not always a linear process. The narrators of the stories make a recollection of fragments and piece them together so that the stories could make sense to the reader or listener. In an interview, Wicomb (2002) reveals that the book (*David's Story*) itself questions the practice of writing someone else's story and foregrounds the practical and ethical problems inherent in this very exercise. As Shane Graham (cited in Moffet, 2006) notes, *David's Story* reveals '…the superficiality of linear telling as a mode of conveying psychological damage' (2008: 131). I am therefore not making any assumptions that the three stories presented here and many others, were narrated to me in their linear form. However, the collective effort and sensitivity as a labor of love, makes it possible to reproduce them here as 'coherent' stories to be analyzed and theorized.

Written from an American context of slavery, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) speaks to the difficulties of reliving traumatic memories. The structure of the book itself is a reflection of a re-collection of fragmented memory, that a story of traumatic events cannot be linear. Based on a real-life story of a slave womxn who killed her daughter while escaping slavery, the ghost—*Beloved*, does not only speak to the difficulty of reliving traumatic memories. But also speaks to how survivors of violence are constantly taken back to the original site of trauma (or violence), in re-membering. The lingering ghost of *Beloved*—Seth's daughter—attests to ways in which the past exists in the present, and how the very existence of the past in the present obscures the imagination of the future (Morrison, 1987). For many womxn that I spoke to, their experiences of violence from apartheid still haunt their present realities as they are constantly taken back to the site of trauma through their everyday encounters with everyday forms of violence.

Zoë Wicomb's (2000) *David's Story* is located in South Africa's city of Cape Town towards the end of the apartheid era. Among other histories, the story plays out some events leading to the democratic transition where David Dirske and his *uMkhonto weSizwe* (MK) (the ANC's armed wing during the liberation struggle) comrades were being demobilized as the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party (NP) government were negotiating the transition. *David's Story* is a multi-layered tale that is relevant in thinking through experiences of South African womxn in many ways.

The fragmentation of *David's Story* speaks to some methodological and ethical issues of representation of other people's experiences. The fragmentation of the story does not only speak to this difficulty, but most importantly, to some of the things that David wanted to distance himself from, or rather things that he thought were not to be spoken about. As the narrator puts it in the preface of the book, 'This is and not David's story' (Wicomb, 2000: 1). This suggests that as much as it is David's story, it is also not his story because he wants to tell the story of Dulcie, of which he is not comfortable with telling. While this is partly a story about David, it is also a story that can be related to many apartheid and post-1994 experiences of womxn both in the anti-apartheid movement and at home. Most importantly, it is a story which, like *Beloved*, shows how the past continues to haunt the present while obscuring the future.

Through the character of an elusive Delcie, Wicomb (2000) draws our attention to different forms of precarity, violence and trauma as encountered by womxn in different spaces. The current scourge of GBV and femicide in South Africa is not something new. Womxn have been going through this form of violence during apartheid, and

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

they continue to do so almost 3 decades after the democratic transition. The scourge of femicide, sexual violence and other experiences are better explained through the following excerpt:

> I ought to explain that there is another page, one without words…There are dismembered shapes of a body: an asexual torso, like a dressmaker's dummy; arms bent the wrong way at the elbows; legs; swollen feet; hands like claws. There is a head, an upside-down smiling head, which admittedly does not resemble her, except for the outline of bushy hair. I have no doubt that this is Dulcie who lies mutilated on the page (Wicomb, 2000: 205).

The dismembering of womxn's bodies, it would seem like it has intensified especially post-1994. Womxn's bodies continue to be crime scenes or *battlefields*, where womxn's bodies become a site of struggle, resistance and contestation (Ndlovu, 2021). Like Delcie, most womxn lie mutilated, whether literally or figuratively. In their everyday encounter with different forms of violence, womxn are constantly dismembered by being killed by their intimate partners, relatives or someone close to them. It is therefore the duty of a researcher who re-collects the stories of womxn's experiences of violence, trauma and survival, to exercise the labor of love as we participate in re-membering womxn's bodies.

4 | NARRATIVES FROM WOMXNS' STORIES

The stories documented here are selected from twenty-two life histories that I documented between 2014 and 2019 while I was conducting research for the doctoral thesis[1] Ndlovu (2020b). The stories are selected because of specific issues that speak to the labor of love in conducting community research. I have chosen to adopt a narrative methodology to lay bare some of the realities of everyday womxn's struggles in the everyday. Grace Musila (2015: 5) notes that narratives can be used 'as a tool for mediating truth and knowledge.' These narratives, although offering a window to some historical reality, also shed light on certain truths and knowledge into these realities (ibid.). These stories represent broader experiences of womxn that I spoke to during fieldwork, and those of South African womxn broadly. More importantly, they challenge the researcher to rethink some of the invasive methodologies that have contributed to the dis-membering of womxn's bodies and experiences.

4.1 | Mam' uThozama*

Mam' uThozama was born in East London and attended school at different local schools until her life was disrupted by the political upheaval in Duncan Village—a township where she grew up. Her first encounter with political activism was in 1976 during the student revolts. She was initiated into politics by her older brothers and other people she considered brothers in the community. It is at this point where she began to be politically active; she was required to hide comrades, transport letters and sometimes act as a messenger between different groups. In 1981 Mam' uThozama left school because of political instability and started working at one of the factories in East London. In the same year, she was encouraged to join a trade union. In 1983 there was a strike in her factory and she was dismissed because of her political activism.

Mam' uThozama's experience of the apartheid era was marred with different aspects of risks, precariousness and violence. She was aware of the fact that she joined politics willingly, yet she was also conscious of the dangers associated with participation in politics. For her, the life of politics meant that one could be raped at any given time, could be killed or detained, and could be forced to witness some of the horrible violent scenes like comrades being killed. This was because at any given moment one was supposed to be a messenger taking letters or messages from

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

one group to another, hiding comrades at one's home despite parents not approving, and always making oneself available for any 'call of duty.'

Mam' uThozama strongly believes that the validation and enabling of patriarchal domination in communities is a problem that is created and nurtured by womxn themselves. She also notes the role of religion in suppressing womxn and undermining their rights. She argues that it is difficult for womxn to advance their careers because they find themselves 'trapped in the kitchen' while men continue behaving as boys in the name of religion and its language of submission. Mam' uThozama also highlighted some challenges of being a womxn in politics. As a holder of a senior political position, she was once threatened with rape, sexual harassment and kidnapping of her children during a sticky tender procurement negotiating process. If one is a womxn, one has to be scared for their life if they are to respect the process and abide by the ethics of service delivery. She concludes by noting that the biggest battle to be fought is the one of the oppression of the mind [*Idabi okumele sililwe lidabi lasenqondweni*] (Adapted from the life history of Mam' uThozama, May 04, 2017).

4.2 | Mam' uYoliswa*

Mam' uYoliswa was born in Duncan Village township in East London and grew up in a one-roomed house that she shared with her family and extended family members. After completing her secondary school studies, she undertook a diploma in teaching. She returned home and started to look for a job. She started her leadership role as a street committee member, moved to the position of an area committee member, and finally to the political branch level. As a young comrade, mam' uYoliswa also experienced challenges from her own comrades. She was supposed to make herself available to the men in her political movement because she was not married or involved in any intimate relationship. Mam' uYoliswa has witnessed some traumatic scenes of violence where her father was taken by police and never returned until his body was found dumped somewhere. She had to be a parent at a young age because, despite the fact that she was the youngest child, her brothers looked up to her for food and everything when their mother was in political detention. One day her brother brought his friends home for a caucus meeting. The friends later gang-raped her, but they refused to take responsibility and her brother threatened her not to tell the neighbors (Adapted from the life history of Mam' uYoliswa, August 13, 2014; September 30, 2017).

4.3 | Nokuzola*

I first met Nokuzola in 2014 when I was doing fieldwork for my masters research project, and we have been very close since then. She assisted me with a lot of interviews, but I had never asked to interview her because I felt that we had grown to be very close. In 2017 when I was about to wrap-up my fieldwork for the doctoral dissertation project, Nokuzola asked if I could document her story too. When I asked if there was anything that she wanted to share with me, she told me that she believes that she has a story to tell. "I am not proud of it [the story], but I believe that if I can share it with you and you share with others it can make an impact on other people's lives." She then handed me an envelope. Inside there was a letter with the story that she had documented for me a few weeks ago. The story was adapted from her diary that she kept over the years.

Nokuzola was born in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. She lost her mother when she was only five and her father who was working away from home, married another womxn. Nokuzola and her brother were abused by their stepmother until they were taken away by social workers after teachers reported the matter. They were taken to live with their aunt where life was also difficult because of poverty. She states: "we later moved to live with my dad who had to negotiate with my stepmother so that we could start afresh." Nokuzola was then abused by her biological father who repeatedly raped her and every time she told her stepmother, she would

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

be accused of lying and wanting to divide the family. She finally confided in her older sister who confirmed that she knew what their father was doing to Nokuzola because he also did the same thing [rape] to her.

Nokuzola left school when she was 13 years old to stay with her friends. She later found a boyfriend who impregnated her. She was staying in the family house of the boyfriend, but they had their own shack in the backyard. Nokuzola documents that she would leave her child with the father and go partying with her friends the whole night as she was still young to be a 'responsible' parent or a wife for that matter. The family of the boyfriend would complain when she went partying, but hardly said a word when the boyfriend was abusing her and beating her up in front of them. One day coming from a night party, her boyfriend tried to beat her up as usual and Nokuzola broke a bottle on his head and ran away. When she heard that he was seriously injured, Nokuzola attempted to commit suicide but was stopped by her friend. She then left for the city [East London] and arrived in the Duncan Village township where I met her in 2008. In her adulthood men still continue to believe that she can "slave for them just for free." Nokuzola believes that men in general live to oppress women. "If it is not sexual harassment, it is emotion, psychological or physical abuse. If it is not that, then they are using their power to silence and dominate womxn at the workplace as they do to all of us every day." (Adapted from a letter by Nokuzola—accessed on October 21, 2017).

5 | REPRESENTING WOMXN'S STORIES—A LABOR OF LOVE

Reflecting on the stories of womxn documented above, it becomes apparent that womxn's struggles in general have taken the same path, however packaged differently for different generations. At the center of all these struggles, violent masculinities and structural patriarchy shape ways in which womxn continue to experience their lives as a constant struggle for survival and resistance. The statement echoed in the prologue of this paper stays alive throughout the lives of the three womxn whose experiences are narrated here. Indeed, they sit with experiences of violence, trauma and survival that are most likely to be spoken about for the first time as they encounter researchers. The methodologies and ethical considerations employed in community research are key to uncovering these sensitive stories. Documenting such experiences of violence and trauma therefore bergs for the researchers to partake in the labor of love that is, working against histories of silencing, dismembering, and erasure, by contributing to the process of re-membering womxn's bodies and experiences in more sensitive and ethical ways.

Annal Lowenhaupt Tsing (1993), *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place*, draws from the work of Merilyn Strathern (1988) and warns against easy assumptions "that women everywhere are the same; that women's speech reveal a women's point of view; that women always speak from a gender identity of woman.' Tsing stresses the necessity of investigating the forms of power and discourse framed by the exclusions and oppositions of gender; "these become the starting point for discussing both 'femaleness' and the 'agency' of any woman's agency" (Tsing, 1993: 33). Tsing's work became a framing ideology throughout the work of data collection, presentation and analysis. Empathy and sensitivity therefore becomes a thread that runs through reading and understanding of the experiences of the marginalized womxn while allowing them to exercise their agency in retelling their experiences and shaping their own stories. This becomes both a responsibility and labor of love for the researcher.

Veena Das (1995) investigates the relationships between language, silence, gesture and suffering to understand expressions of pain. She concludes that "as human understanding gives way; language is struck dumb. When violence annihilates language, it creates its own fear; a relapse into a dumb condition is not only a sign of this period but it is also a part of the terror itself. Yet silence does not bring an end to communication or to understanding; thus, for the analyst, it is the silences that need to be addressed" (Das, 1995: 184, 191). In interpreting the stories shared by womxn documented here, I had to pay attention to different ways in which these womxn chose to express their everyday struggles, pain and traumatic experiences. This means that there were moments where I took them back to the site of violence as they tried to remember and re-collect fragments of their life histories. What I

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

presented as case studies are narratives that are embedded in this understanding of experiences of struggle, trauma and pain. I had to make sense of these fragmented gaps, cues and silences, as Das (1995) advises. Das' work is also key to understanding ways in which historical episodic moments of violence and trauma presented in all three womxn stories continue to haunt the lives of the narrators.

6 | CULTURAL ETHICS—AS A LABOR OF LOVE

The issue of consent as embedded in methodologies is one of the most contested terrains that affect other methodological and ethical concerns in the field. In conducting research for the doctoral research project, I did not struggle with obtaining consent in terms of participants agreeing to participate in my study. Once they had established that my research was not harmful, most participants were willing to participate. However, consent remains complex in community research that seeks to partake in ethical research that adopts methodologies that seek to work against long histories of silencing and erasure of Black womxn's voices. Drawing from my own experiences of participating in a topless protest as a university student at the University of Witwatersrand during #feesmustfall protests in 2016 (see Ndlovu, 2017), I realized that in some African communities, consent is a complicated issue that does not only involve individual agency. No matter how much one becomes progressive with the politics of owning our bodies, our agency is always compromised or will always be interrogated within the societal structures where we exist. When I used my agency to strip off and participate in a topless protest, my immediate family was not ashamed and they never questioned my actions. However, on returning home over the holidays, my community held me accountable for my actions that had seemingly breached some 'collective' norms and values that govern womxn's bodies in my community. This meant that I had to undergo a public trial in the village, explaining why I stripped off my clothes in front of thousands of people and millions of television viewers. A deep reading and re-reading of stories that I have documented above, and others that form part of the broader project especially those of gender-based violence and trauma, suggest that consent is not a once-off event, but an ongoing process that needs to be renegotiated throughout the research process. It is part of labor of love to remain conscious of the danger that when womxn give consent about their lives, they unconsciously consent on behalf of their families and communities and they are held to account for their person choices, therefore demanding transformative methodologies that are conscious of the histories of dis-membering of womxn's bodies.

Kiguwa (2019) notes that the "research encounter is invariably marked by unequal relations of power between participants and researchers." In realization of this dilemma, she asks a challenging question:– 'To what degree is it possible to recover and not appropriate the voices of the powerless?' (Kiguwa, 2019: 232). The powerless here are the participants who do not enjoy the opportunity to present their stories in the academic spaces and prestigious journals where we get to publish work theorized from their personal experiences (Muholi, 2004). In trying to mediate this dilemma, after many attempts of re-producing the stories of womxn in ways that do not expose them to further forms of dismembering, I had to consult the participants whose stories I draw from at length to participate in the process of re-writing the stories and to confirm the version that they would be comfortable with. This does not mean that I had solved the ethical dilemma as these negotiated positions can shift or change at any time as participants change their minds. However, the end product of the stories reproduced here are a negotiated version between participants and the researcher, and I argue that this exercise could only be possible if doing community research becomes a labor of love.

Some of the traditional social sciences methodologies put emphasis on questions of objectivity and remaining neutral while conducting fieldwork research. This means that the researcher is not expected to be involved in personal community issues as a way of exercising objectivity. Describing scenes of violence among Sikh residents in Delhi, Veena Das argues that her own:

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

> … 'entry' into the field was not marked by any of the slow rituals of initiation through which the anthropologists become a part of the everyday life of a community. It was as if a wound has suddenly opened up, slashing through connected tissues. My very presence in the 'field' was not that of an anthropologist conducting fieldwork. Along with several others, I had undertaken to act in this emergency of the safety of the survivors and to work toward their rehabilitation. These questions then, were grounded in the question of how the survivors were to rebuild their lives, to pick up the pieces and find out how and whether to go on, that is, to go on living in this very place of devastation, as of something over (Das, 2007: 13).

Similar to Das' account, I found myself participating in everyday lives of the community members. Most importantly, I found myself trapped in the process of finding ways in which survivors of rape and violence could move on with their lives after sharing some of the experiences that have taken them to the original site of violence and source of trauma.

Dealing with issues of violence and trauma is another ethical dilemma encountered by researchers conducting fieldwork in marginalized communities and it demands reflective methodologies that pay attention to specific experiences of marginality. When I was applying for ethics clearance for the doctoral project, I was asked to make provisions for how I was going to deal with post-interviews trauma after traumatizing the participants by asking them about some of their experiences in their violent past. One of the convenient responses to this ethical issue is to consider counseling facilities for participants to deal with secondary trauma. However, the realities of partaking in research that contributes to human dignity, researchers are forced to confront different ways of dealing with trauma and violence in Black African communities. This comes with the realization that different communities have their own ways of dealing with trauma in ways that are different from what we tend to assume or impose as researchers. After long hours of narrating their stories, there were those moments where womxn told me that they have never spoken to anyone about some of the events that they shared with me. There was silence, cries and other non-verbal cues as they recollected the fragments of their life stories. It is that closing line that says after the conversation they felt relieved. '*Kwangathi kususwe ilitye emagxeni ami. Ndizoke ndilale ubuthongo namhlanje emva kweminyaka engaka!*' [I feel like something has been lifted off my shoulders. I am finally going to have a peaceful sleep today after all these years] (Life history, Duncan Village, 2017).

7 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the piece quoted from Das (2007: 13), she narrates moments where wounds from the injured persons suddenly open up, "slash through connected tissues" thereby directly connecting her to the emergency on the ground. But, what do we make of this transfer of traumatic experiences that are narrated through stories? How do we comprehend the pain and deal with it when old womxn finally say they are going to sleep for the first time after sharing their traumatic stories? Of course there is that sense of relief from a researcher after anticipating that the interviews might contribute to secondary trauma for the participants sharing their experiences. However, beyond that moment of relief, there is another moment where, as researchers, we need to reflect on the methodologies and ethical guidelines that we employ in researching marginalized communities, and how these contribute to processes of healing. Intersectional feminism(s) and fragmented narratives are some of the methodological and ethical considerations that can form building blocks towards reflexive methodologies that foster healing. Employing these methodologies and ethics, among others, work against histories of silencing, erasure and dis-membering, while contributing to the re-membering of womxn's bodies and experiences. For the researcher, this responsibility becomes a labor of love that contributes to restoring humanity and dignity in our communities.

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper acknowledges funding from the National Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) for the funding that funded fieldwork research for the doctoral thesis.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ORCID

Hlengiwe Ndlovu https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7892-4228

ENDNOTE

[1] Some parts of the stories appear in my doctoral thesis for which the data used on this paper was collected for (Ndlovu, 2020a). Fractured Communities and the Elusive State: A Study of State/Society Relations in Duncan Village. PhD thesis. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, Sara. 2020. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press.

Bilge, Sirma, and Patricia Hill Collins. 2016. *Intersectionality*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Carastathis, Anna. 2014. "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory." *Philosophy Compass* 9(5): 304–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12129.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination." *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* 138(1990): 221–38.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1990. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241–99. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039.

Das, Veena. 1995. *Critical Events: Anthropological Approaches to Contemporary India*. London and New Delhi: Routledge.

Das, Veena. 2007. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. University of California Press.

Dill, Bonnie Thornton, and Ruth Enid Zambrana. 2020. "Critical Thinking about Inequality: An Emerging Lens." In *Feminist Theory Reader*, 108–16. Routledge.

Duncan Village. 2017. *Life History*. Duncan Village: East London.

East London. 2017. *Life History*. Duncan Village: East London.

Emejulu, Akwugo, and Francesca Sobande. 2023. "Intersectional Vulnerabilities and the Banality of Harm: the Dangerous Desires of Women of Color Activists." *Meridians* 22(1): 76–93. https://doi.org/10.1215/15366936-10220491.

Kiguwa, Peace. 2019. "Feminist Approaches: An Exploration of Women's Gendered Experiences." In *Transforming Research Methods in the Social Sciences: Case Studies from South Africa 220-235*.

Kiguwa, P. 2019. "Feminist Approaches: An Exploration of Women's Gendered Experiences." In *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press.

Lykke, Nina. 2010. *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing*, Vol. 1. Routledge.

Markham, Annette N. 2005. "Go Ugly Early: Fragmented Narrative and Bricolage as Interpretive Method." *Qualitative Inquiry* 11(6): 813–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405280662.

Moffett, Helen. 2006. "'These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them': Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32(1): 129–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070500493845.

Morrison, Tonni. 1987. *Beloved. 1987*, 252. New York: Plume.

Motsemme, Nthabiseng. 2011. Lived and Embodied Suffering and Healing Amongst Mothers and Daughters in Chesterville Township, KwaZulu-Natal (Doctoral Dissertation).

Muholi, Zanele. 2004. "Thinking through Lesbian Rape." *Agenda* 18(61): 116–25.

Musila, Grace A. 2015. *A Death Retold in Truth and Rumour: Kenya, Britain and the Julie Ward Murder*. Boydell and Brewer.

Ndlovu, Hlengiwe. 2017. "Womxn's Bodies Reclaiming the Picket Line: The 'nude'protest during# FeesMustFall." *Agenda* 31(3–4): 68–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2017.1391613.

Ndlovu, Hlengiwe. 2020a. *"Fractured Communities and the Elusive State: A Study of State/Society Relations in Duncan Village." PhD Thesis*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Ndlovu, Hlengiwe. 2020b. "Bodies that (Do Not) Matter? Black Sunday and Narratives of the Death of Sister Aidan Quinlan in Duncan Village Protest, 1952." *Agenda* 34(1): 48–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2019.1690314.
Ndlovu, Hlengiwe. 2021. "Entangled Battlefields: Challenges of Precarity for Womxn under COVID-19." *Agenda* 35(4): 110–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2022.2031731.
Samuelson, Meg. 2007. "The Disfigured Body of the Female guerrilla:(De) Militarization, Sexual Violence, and Redomestication in Zoë Wicomb's David's Story." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 32(4): 833–56. https://doi.org/10.1086/512491.
Sen, Gita, and Caren Grown. 2013. *Development Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives*. Routledge.
Soldatic, Karen, and Shaun Grech. 2014. "Transnationalising Disability Studies: Rights, Justice and Impairment." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 34(2). https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v34i2.4249.
Strathern, Marilyn. 1988. *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*. Univ of California Press.6.
Tamale, Sylvia. 2008. "'The Right to Culture and the Culture of Rights: A Critical Perspective on Women's Sexual Rights in Africa." *Feminist Legal Studies* 16(1): 47–69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-007-9078-6.
Tate, Shirley Anne. 2019. "Contemptible Commemoration: Racial Capitalism and Love/Care for Long Dead Sambo." In *Decolonising Sambo: Transculturation, Fungibility and Black and People of Colour Futurity*, 87–108. Emerald Publishing Limited.
Tronto, Joan. 2020. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. Routledge.
Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 1993. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-Of-The-Way Place*. Princeton University Press.
Walker, Alice. 1983 In *Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
Weatherall, Ruth. 2020. "Even when Those Struggles Are Not Our Own: Storytelling and Solidarity in a Feminist Social Justice Organization." *Gender, Work and Organization* 27(4): 471–86. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12386.
Wicomb, Zoe. 2000. *David's Story*. New York: Feminist Press at CUNY.
Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2006. "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13(3): 193–209. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506806065752.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Hlengiwe Ndlovu is a Senior Lecturer at the Wits School of Governance (WSG), University of the Witwatersrand. Her research interests include questions of gender and gender equality, democracy from below, local governance, protests, collective action and change. Among other publications, Hlengiwe has written on the role of women in the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa, histories of participation of women in community protests and the precarity of women during the Covid 19 pandemic. She is also the co-editor of *Rioting and Writing: Diaries of the Wits #Fallists*, (2017)—a edited book documenting the experiences of student activists during the #FeesMustFall protests.

How to cite this article: Ndlovu, Hlengiwe. 2024. "Labor of Love: Re-membering Dismembered Bodies in Community Research." *Gender, Work & Organization* 31(6): 2686–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13117.

14680432, 2024, 6, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13117 by University Of Witwatersrand, Wiley Online Library on [12/12/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License