

Resurrecting wounds in the after-life of apartheid¹

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Introduction

During a moving eulogy spoken at Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's official funeral service at Orlando Stadium in Soweto, the president of the Republic of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, shared a tender account of how himself and five other leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) visited the home of Mama Winnie (as she was affectionately known) to pay their condolences to the family on the day after she had died. He told the tens of thousands of mourners at the stadium, and the millions more tuning in via radio and television, how he was touched when Zenani Mandela, Mama Winnie's daughter, overcome by emotion, reflected on the great suffering her mother bore during her life. For Ramaphosa,

“... Zenani's tears revealed Mama Winnie's wounds... It brought to mind the moment when Jesus said to his apostle Thomas, “Put your finger here, see my hands, reach out your hand and put it in my side.” In essence, Jesus was saying to his apostle: touch my wounds... We must also recognise our own wounds, we must acknowledge that we are a society that is hurting, damaged by our past, numbed by our present and hesitant about our future. This may explain why we are so easily prone to anger and to violence... Many people saw Mamma Winnie as their mother because her own wounds made her real and easy to relate to. It's only when you experience real pain yourself that you can recognise it in others and offer comfort and healing. We have seen and touched those wounds, it is now time to heal the wounds that we have seen, the wounds that were inflicted on all of us, on Mama Winnie in the past.”²

In this striking moment, Ramaphosa – as with needle and thread – stitched together the wounds of Jesus with the wounds of Mama Winnie with the wounds of a society. It was a way of inviting mourners into a process of healing their shared wounds by seeing and being touched by their personal and collective

¹ This article is a slightly revised version of a public lecture delivered on 24 April 2018 at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam upon invitation by the Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Peace & Justice Studies. It formed part of the Centre's 2018 Public Lecture Series: *Peace, Trauma and Religion in Post-Apartheid South Africa*.

² Cyril Ramaphosa, *Eulogy delivered at Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's funeral*. Orlando Stadium, Soweto, 14 April 2018.

wounds. For me, Ramaphosa's eulogy also becomes an opportunity for theological reflection on life in the wake of a historical trauma such as apartheid, inspired by the resurrection of a wounded Jesus.

Before proceeding, however, it is important that I make a comment about the place that I speak from. I am a white Afrikaner man – born in the late 1980's into an upper middle class family. I am also a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRCSA), a church that has explicit historical ties to the construction and promotion of the apartheid ideology. These markers are important for me to acknowledge when I am asked to speak on peace, trauma and religion as someone living in South Africa. Besides the fact that I speak from a place of privilege, this implies that when Ramaphosa spoke of Mama Winnie's wounds, and how her wounds made her easy to relate to, he may not have had me in mind. I do not easily relate to Mama Winnie's wounds. Unlike millions of mourners listening to Ramaphosa on that day, I struggle to see her wounds and I often fail to touch "the wounds that were inflicted on all of us." From the outset, therefore, I emphasise the contextual nature and the limitations of the reflections that follow. If, like Ramaphosa, I speak of wounds with a longing for greater recognition, reparation and healing, I do not pretend to speak on behalf of all who live in South Africa, and therefore deliberately restrict my attention here to the wound-work that lies before white people in South Africa today.

This article addresses the question: 'what does Christian witness mean in South Africa today?' The call to bear witness to Christ's redemption and reconciliation is a central, universally recognisable aspect of Christian faith and life. My premise, however, is that theological questions always emerge contextually and therefore require answers that are contextually sensitive and responsible. Therefore, my question could be further narrowed down. 'What might Christian witness mean for the 'white church' that I belong to in South Africa today?' Of course, this narrow focus in no way precludes the possibility and desire that these reflections might also be of value beyond my immediate context.

I want to suggest that the symbol of Jesus' resurrection and ascension may be one helpful place to reflect on this question. In particular, my focus will be on that part of the tradition that imagines Jesus' resurrection as a resurrection of wounds. Further clarification is however required of what Ramaphosa meant when he said that "we are a society that is hurting, damaged by our past, numbed by our present and hesitant about our future." Therefore, in *part one*, I will apply insights from the broad field of trauma studies to the South African context as one way of understanding the wounded character of life 'after' apartheid. My primary source for this hermeneutical lens of trauma is the work of North American theologian, Shelly Rambo, who has very creatively facilitated a dialogue between trauma studies and the Christian tradition.³ Therefore, in *part two*, I will give a very brief introduction to her thought before moving, in *part three*, to her re-reading of the encounter referred to by Ramaphosa, between the risen Jesus and his apostle Thomas. Finally, in *part four*, in a mode of self-critical reflection, I will apply these

³ My debt to the work of Shelly Rambo is great. Much of what follows is inspired by the following two works: *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017).

thoughts to the question of authentic Christian witness in and by the denomination that I belong to in South Africa today.

1. Trauma and the after-life of apartheid

Trauma has always been with us, but the concept of trauma and the field of trauma studies is relatively young. The term trauma first became popular after WWII and burst into everyday parlance in the 1980's with the notion of 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD). The idea that experiences of loss or violence leave behind a hidden wound – trauma literally means 'wound' in Greek – that remains alive long after the initial occurrence fundamentally changed the way that we view and deal with human suffering. Trauma studies allows us to linger on this elusive nature of suffering, which manifests on at least three fronts, with regards to 'time', 'body' and 'language'.⁴

Firstly, trauma manifests as distortions of our human sense of *time*. Anyone familiar with PTSD, for instance, will be able to tell you that time does not 'heal all wounds', as the cliché goes. Rather, time is part of the wound itself. Distortions in time are what constitute the wound.

This complex relationship between trauma and time is evident in Ramaphosa's comment that we as South Africans are "damaged by our past, numbed by our present and hesitant about our future." In trauma, the flow of time from past to present to future is disrupted. The past invades the present to the extent that the violence and suffering of the past is relived and repeated. Such invasions often result in the loss of the present as a time of initiative and agency. Trauma also impairs one's ability to reckon with the future, as plans and hopes make way for the task of anxiously avoiding situations that might trigger a debilitating flashback. Trauma theorists often speak of trauma's 'double structure' to refer to how an initial traumatic occurrence can have a belated awakening, even years later, unexpectedly, without rhyme or reason.

Rambo tells of a conversation she had had with a man from New Orleans twenty-nine months after the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina about how they were getting along. He told her about a strong drive to claim that New Orleans was back to normal: "People keep telling us to get over it already." However, such restorative language obscured the many ways in which things were *not* back to normal. Then he said: "The storm is gone, but the 'after-the-storm' is always here."⁵ Trauma studies teaches us that suffering and loss cannot be isolated to a particular time and place. Life after suffering, life after death, is life marked by death and loss; it is wounded life. The storm is gone, but the 'after-the-storm' is always here.

⁴ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, 18–21.

⁵ Rambo, 1–2.

Secondly, trauma studies has also made us more aware of how traumatic experiences are registered and remembered by our *bodies*, often in ways that escape conscious thought and awareness. Bessel van der Kolk has recently shed important light on how traumatised bodies can ‘keep the score’ in debilitating ways that keep us trapped in the past.⁶ For my purposes, however, I will only mention how this also holds in a more metaphorical sense for our social bodies.

In a deeply personal narration of the history of race in the United States, author and poet Wendell Berry speaks of racism as a ‘hidden wound’ that lives under the surface of America’s collective skin.⁷ The visceral, embodied character of his language is striking: “The wound is in me,” he writes, “as complex and deep in my flesh as blood and nerves.”⁸ By choosing to speak of racism as a hidden wound that operates under the surface of skin, Berry questions the common notion that race is a wound of the past, something left behind. His imagery invites us to delve below the surface of things to where race, like blood and nerves, operates in hidden yet powerful ways, inhabiting the fibres of our collective body. Furthermore, Berry directs our attention to the hereditary nature of a racialised imagination that – like genes – is secretly passed on from generation to generation.

Thirdly, trauma exposes the fragility of *language*. The traumatic is exactly that which cannot be assimilated or integrated into our personal and collective narratives. It is the unclaimed experience that nevertheless makes itself felt in the present, thereby placing us in the impossible position of having to speak the unspeakable. This loss of speech often deepens the suffering of traumatised persons for it isolates them from their community. The inability to communicate severs bonds of trust, causing our social world to disintegrate along with our sense of self and identity. Furthermore, the difficulty of speaking of traumatic experiences is linked to the vulnerability of witnessing to such experiences. Internally, one even doubts one’s own experience, while externally, traumatic wounds become easy to dismiss, deny or cover over.⁹

Berry’s use of ‘hidden wound’ has a dual meaning. As ideology and myth there is an unconscious hiddenness to racial constructs. Yet it is equally a wound that is *intentionally* hidden, obscured, denied, dismissed. The stories we casually tell of ourselves and others are the means by which systems of racial prejudice and oppression become entrenched and passed on from generation to generation;

⁶ *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

⁷ Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound*, Kindle ed. (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2010). I was first introduced to Berry’s valuable literary contribution to the vexed question of race in chap. 3 of Rambo’s *Resurrecting Wounds: ‘Surfacing Wounds: Christian Theology and Resurrecting Histories in the Age of Ferguson’*.

⁸ Berry, loc. 33.

⁹ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, 21–26.

simultaneously, however, they operate to cover over these mechanisms, hiding their own performance from view, protecting us from truths that are too brutal to bear.¹⁰

This holds in a special way for our Christian stories. “Far from curing the wound of racism,” says Berry, “the white man’s Christianity has been its soothing bandage – a bandage masquerading as Sunday clothes, for the wearing of which one expects a certain moral credit.”¹¹ White man’s Christianity, approaching wounds from a position of privilege, does not deny the existence of wounds *per se* but “spiritualises, interiorises or privatises the wounds.”¹² In this way, says Rambo, “Christianity claims to offer healing, but in fact is implicated in the covering up and covering over wounds that lie beneath the surface.”¹³

So far, I have introduced the notion of trauma as a way of speaking of historical violence as that which lingers. I have shown that trauma complexifies our experience of time; that it is an embodied wound that disrupts our dominant logics; and finally, how it exposes the limitations of language and narrative, of testimony, witness and recognition. With the literary help of Wendell Berry, I have also connected the concept of trauma to the ‘hidden wound’ of racism. To anyone familiar with South Africa it should be immediately obvious how these insights can be applied to life in South Africa today. To use Rambo’s terminology, South Africans are living in the ‘after-life’ of apartheid. “Apartheid is over, but the ‘after-apartheid’ is always here.” Apartheid and its racialised imagination is not a *historical* wound, if by that one means a wound that *has passed*. Rather, it is a *hidden wound*, painfully alive and powerfully active, living under the collective skin of all who live in South Africa.

What then might it mean to witness to the Christian hope of a redeemed and reconciled human community – when the ‘after-apartheid’ is always here?

2. Trauma and Christian witness: Shelly Rambo

Wrestling with these questions, I have found the work of the North American theologian, Shelly Rambo, very helpful. In two, well-received publications – *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (2010) and *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (2017) – Rambo has sought to apply the lens of trauma to the Christian tradition. For her, trauma is not one more issue that theology addresses but a lived reality from which Christian traditions need to be fundamentally rethought. “Trauma brings to theology a new ignorance,” she says.¹⁴ Knowing what we know about trauma, theologies that apply a

¹⁰ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, 72.

¹¹ *The Hidden Wound*, loc. 242.

¹² Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, 74.

¹³ Rambo, 73–74.

¹⁴ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, 17.

redemptive gloss or soothing bandage over festering wounds, not only sound hollow and unconvincing, but dangerously partake in suffering's repetition. Yet these types of theologies, like "the white man's Christianity" mentioned by Berry, still have immense influence in South Africa.

In *Spirit and Trauma*, Rambo invites us to consider what it might mean to be witnesses from within the complex in-between experience of 'remaining'. In other words, how do we witness as those who remain; but also to what remains of death within life? From the perspective of trauma, the encounters between the risen Jesus and his disciples are less about an 'afterlife' (i.e. existence in some other world after death) than they are about 'after-living'. What promise does the resurrection hold for those who remain; for those who live on after experiences of death, loss and violence?

One of Rambo's most important contributions is to reclaim the 'testimonial' character of Christian witness as truth-telling, lament, confession of guilt – different ways of giving testimony to what is unspeakable, unclaimed, hidden, repressed. Complimenting the more dominant models of Christian witness as 'proclamation' (proclaiming the gospel); and witness as 'imitation' (a life of discipleship that embodies Christ's example of self-giving love), Rambo recalls that neglected aspect of the Christian tradition that bears witness by giving testimony to human suffering.¹⁵ This testimonial character of Christian witness means that we position ourselves in respect to suffering and wounds in ways that allow hidden truths to emerge through the cracks of repressive and evasive logics.¹⁶

3. Resurrecting wounds in the after-life of apartheid

In *Resurrecting Wounds* Rambo continues this work by applying the lens of trauma to the famous narrative of Jesus' resurrected return to his disciples in John 20:19-28.

It is late at night, on the Sunday after Jesus' brutal crucifixion. The disciples (traumatised?) are on lockdown. In fear of being persecuted by the same people who murdered Jesus, they are hiding in a room with the doors barricaded. Suddenly, Jesus appears among them, almost ghostlike, except that he is flesh and bones like them. He blesses them: "Peace be with you!" And then, immediately, he shows them his hands where he still bears the wounds of where nails pierced them; also the wound on his side where the spear entered his body.

We are all familiar with how the story unfolds. One of the disciples, Thomas, was not there on this occasion. When he hears the other disciples' account of what happened he defiantly claims that he would not believe, "unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side." Eight days later, when the disciples were again gathered in the room – still on

¹⁵ Rambo, 36–41.

¹⁶ Rambo, 40.

lockdown, but with Thomas present on this occasion – Jesus appears again. “Peace be with you!” he blesses them. Then Jesus, standing, wounded before his apostle, repeats the words that Thomas spoke when Jesus was absent. He invites Thomas to bring his finger and put it in his wounds, to take his hand and thrust it into his side. “My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaims in response.

What is this story about? The dominant interpretation, is that this is a story about faith, or rather about *doubt*. It is, after all, the story of the ‘doubting Thomas’. “Do you believe because you have seen? Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe.” Faith is more than sight; trust is more than certainty; don’t be like the sceptical Thomas who requires proof; believe and you will have life. We have all either heard or preached the sermon. Something, however, gets lost in this interpretation. Interpreters following this line tend to overlook or belittle the importance of wounds surfacing on the body of the resurrected Jesus. Many, like John Calvin in his commentary on this text, view the wounds as little more than temporary signs, as God’s way of accommodating the sceptical Thomas in his moment of doubt. In the context of Calvin’s Eucharistic polemics, Jesus’ wounds are erased.¹⁷

However, exegetes like Shelly Rambo (and Cyril Ramaphosa!) invite us to take seriously the fact that God’s resurrecting work includes the resurrection of wounds. What is the author of the Fourth Gospel getting at with this wound-story? What does it mean that God, in raising Jesus, also raises his wounds, bringing them from the dark and inaccessible grave into the light – within view, within reach? What is the significance of wounds surfacing in the midst of the worshiping community gathering around the risen Jesus? How should we interpret the invitation to see and touch Jesus’ wounds? Are his wounds just unimportant background to a story about belief and doubt? Or can they be acknowledged as an integral part of a story about how God raises us to reconciled life in community – also, even within the undead tenacity of apartheid’s afterlife?

Of foremost importance for this question is the issue of *recognition*. Resurrection appearances of Jesus are often accompanied by misrecognition, by a failure by his followers to recognise him. Here, however, the disciples seem to have no problem recognising Jesus. We are told that “the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.”

Recognition may, however, be more complex than it seems. Shelly Rambo draws our attention to the uncanny way in which Jesus is prompted to repeat his initial greeting of peace when his wounded appearance is so easily met with rejoicing.¹⁸ Doesn’t their rejoicing have a false ring to it in the chamber of fear they have locked themselves into? Rambo invites us to reconsider the disciples’ response to Jesus’ frighteningly intimate gesture of showing them his wounds. Wouldn’t their rejoicing, in such a situation, count as one more profound example of *misrecognition*? They see Jesus, but have they also seen his

¹⁷ See Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, chap. 1, ‘Erasing Wounds: John Calvin and the Problem of the Resurrected Body’.

¹⁸ Rambo, chaps 80–84.

wounds? And, have they truly recognised the wounds if they have not also seen in them their own complicity in Christ's wounding; their betrayal and denial? Perhaps this misrecognition is what prompts Jesus to repeat himself: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Do the disciples recognise what it implies when the crucified, wounded One sends them – as the Father has sent him?

The surfacing of wounds does not guarantee recognition. In South Africa, when wounds surface in public they are often accompanied by powerful emotions: confusion, doubt, fear, anger, shame. Like the disciples who are on lockdown, white people in South Africa, afraid of losing control, are in constant danger of becoming entrenched in our wounded logics, which in turn sustain faulty optics. The ease with which we claim to see and understand, very often belies a more profound failure to recognise the wounds of others, but also our own wounds, including our shame, doubt and fear.

One example, drawn from a 2015 survey by the *Institute for Justice and Reconciliation*, may illustrate how complex recognition can be.¹⁹ In response to the statement, "South Africans still need reconciliation," 74% of white people taking the survey agreed that South Africans do still need reconciliation; 12.8 % were neutral; only 13.2% disagreed.²⁰ Clearly, the language of reconciliation resonates with the vast majority of white South Africans as something that is necessary and desirable (a high percentage when compared to other racial groups, among whom the average agreement was 69.7 %).²¹ Apparently, white people have little problem recognising the need for reconciliation.

Responses to a second statement, however, sheds important light on the meaning attached to reconciliation among the white respondents. To the statement, "Reconciliation is impossible if those disadvantaged under apartheid remain poor," only 49.5% of white people agreed; 19.3% were neutral; while 31.2% disagreed with the statement.²² While white South Africans seem to believe that reconciliation is necessary, less than half of them, according to this sample, are able to recognise a connection between reconciliation and creating an equal and dignified society; between restoring relationships and redressing ongoing injustices; between forgiveness and reparation. The fact that more than 50% of the white respondents could have any doubt that the ongoing poverty of the majority of their fellow citizens who were disadvantaged by apartheid was a hindrance to reconciliation, suggests a profound misrecognition of the harm caused by ongoing economic injustice, inequality, and poverty (by comparison, only 11.3 percent of black respondents could disagree with the statement).²³ Like the

¹⁹ Jan Hofmeyer and Rajen Govender, 'South African Reconciliation Barometer Briefing Paper 1: National Reconciliation, Race Relations, and Social Inclusion' (Cape Town, 2015).

²⁰ Hofmeyer and Govender, 6.

²¹ Hofmeyer and Govender, 6.

²² Hofmeyer and Govender, 7.

²³ Hofmeyer and Govender, 7.

rejoicing disciples, we might see the wounds, but it remains a question whether we really recognise them for what they are.

It is to the credit of Black Theology (on both sides of the Atlantic) that it has deepened our understanding of the question of how and why white people ‘fail to see’. Thanks to theologians like James Cone, Delores Williams and Willie Jennings (Rambo’s primary dialogue partners) we are today more attuned to the ways in which prejudice, power and privilege also inhabit our theological discourses to perform operations of erasure that hide unjust and unequal relationships from view. By, for instance, interpreting Christian narratives in unhistorical, decontextualized ways, it is not so much that white people *refuse* to see, as it is a matter of being rooted in “dynamics of not-seeing,” sustained by broader systems of formation that train persons *not to see* certain things.²⁴ In this regard, without placing the burden of conscientization on victims of racism, white Christians have a lot to gain from listening to black voices that expose the ways in which our practices of faith – done from a place of privilege – tend to sever the connection between the cross of Christ and the ongoing crosses of history.²⁵

In this regard, the surfacing of wounds on the body of the risen Jesus and the invitation to see and touch those wounds present a radical alternative. It is a compelling Easter-message, of God working to bring wounds from the dark and inaccessible grave to the light, to where they are within reach, to where they can be touched and tended and transfigured. However, “to make sense of the ‘living on’ of racial wounds,” Rambo reminds us, “it is crucial to read the wounds of cross and resurrection together. The wounds of crucifixion return, not to be relived but to surface the wounds made invisible in the ongoingness of the crosses of history. The dynamics operative in surfacing wounds are complex, and they involve working through denial, fear, and the insidious operations of privilege.”²⁶ Resurrection, here, has liberating and empowering implications as it creatively brings forth the possibility of surfacing wounds in order for them to be transfigured and healed, making possible a different relationship to the past that liberates the present and revives hope for a reconciled future.

However, as with the confrontation between Jesus and Thomas, such working through denial, fear and privilege to arrive at greater recognition and perhaps, eventually, reconciliation can be very painful. Just as Thomas and the disciples were also confronted with their own complicity in the wounding of Jesus when Jesus showed them his wounds, so the raising and tending of the hidden wound of race in South Africa today will only happen through confrontation and engagement with painful feelings of shame, guilt, loss and betrayal. With this in mind, I conclude with some remarks about how resurrecting wounds

²⁴ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, 93.

²⁵ Rambo, 75–80. See James H Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011); Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Takatso Alfred Mofokeng, *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology* (Kampen: Uitgeverij JH Kok, 1983).

²⁶ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, 79.

may bear witness in my own church denomination, the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRCSA).

4. Resurrecting wounds in the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa?

The call for congregations to participate in the life of the *missio Dei* by becoming missional communities has in recent years become a widespread and influential discourse in the DRCSA and the world wide ecumenical church. Often this discourse employs the metaphor of “crossing borders” to motivate and orient congregations in their response to this missional call. Christians are encouraged to cross (actual and imaginary) borders, thereby imitating the missional life of the triune God who is always crossing borders to others; to create community, to heal and feed, to challenge unjust societal structures in the name of love and justice.

Cobus Van Wyngaard has argued that this discourse of crossing borders in the DRCSA has also become an important tool for reimagining whiteness in a post-apartheid context.²⁷ In spite of good intentions, practices of crossing borders (often to perform charitable acts amongst people who are poor and black) may inadvertently serve to entrench assumptions of whiteness, such as that the whole world is accessible to those who are white, while access to the white enclave (white suburbs and gated communities) remain carefully controlled. Even when boundary-crossing practices aim at listening and learning from others, white persons usually remain the agents who decide which borders will be crossed and whose voices will be listened to.²⁸

To the extent that the discourse and practice of crossing borders often fails to address the hidden wound of race and racism, there is a danger that it becomes a theologically sophisticated way of covering over the hidden wound, thus avoiding the deep engagement and painful confrontation involved in allowing wounds to surface. In this light, the image of Jesus bringing silenced and repressed wounds into a locked chamber to initiate a process of wound-work among his terrified disciples offers a striking contrast to the picture of white congregations valiantly crossing borders to bring healing to others. As a commissioning text, John’s account of the wounded One sending his disciples “as the Father sent him” suggests that being a missional congregation may include the cultivation of communities that are empowered to welcome wounds into the risen Christ’s presence, allowing wounds themselves to bear witness to wrongs of the past, but also the ongoing wrongs that need to be exposed and made right in the present.

Instead of asking ourselves, ‘what border am I called to cross?’ the more urgent questions, for white persons and groups might be: ‘What wounds are surfacing on the body of Christ? What is preventing me/

²⁷ Cobus van Wyngaard, ‘White Christians Crossing Borders: Between Perpetuation and Transformation’, in *Unsettling Whiteness*, ed. Lucy Michael and Samantha Schulz (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2014), 191–202.

²⁸ van Wyngaard, 196–97.

us from seeing and being touched by the wounded Christ in those who are wounded, including myself/ourselves? What stones are the resurrecting God rolling away to bear testimony to the ongoing wounding of God's creation and, therefore, the wounding of Godself? How can my own woundedness be of service to God's healing work?

At this point, it is necessary to raise a point of caution. Wounds, like all phenomena, call for constant interpretation and theological discernment. One important distinction that needs to be kept in mind when speaking of wounds surfacing on the body of Christ, is the theological distinction between the general suffering of humankind and suffering 'for the sake of Christ and the gospel'. The wounds surfacing on the body of the resurrected Jesus also have a special significance as 'stigmata', i.e. as scars borne of the scandal of the cross, wounds of persecution that Jesus suffered as a consequence of his obedience to the way of self-giving love and unconditional grace. Only in this Christological light, in the context of discipleship, should cross-bearing and self-denial be understood, and never as the romanticising of wounds or the theological justification of ongoing suffering.

The call in the DRCSA to partake in 'wound-work' should not therefore be confused with a vague affirmation of the woundedness of all people or the appropriation of victimhood in a veiled attempt to gain or maintain power in a changed political landscape. Rather, the invitation to see and touch the 'stigmata' on Jesus' risen body should be heard as a call to discipleship, a call to partake in the scandal of the cross (which includes the scandal of resurrected wounds!) as a consequence of being sent by Jesus "as the Father sent me." More specifically, it involves embracing the truth that the wound-work required by white people in South Africa today is likely to be costly, involving self-denial, and due to its counter-cultural nature, often also ostracization and even persecution.

Finally, with reference to the important work of Michael Rothberg,²⁹ Rambo also sheds light on how wounds often surface within a logic of competition in which they are "jockeying for space in the marketplace of memory."³⁰ Competition for limited attention and resources in the public sphere can create a stifling atmosphere in which experiences of suffering are pitted against each other. Sometimes this competitive environment even results in the creation of a "hierarchy of suffering" that disregards the incomparable uniqueness of each experience of suffering. As a consequence, some wounds are never able or allowed to surface; and when they do, only in exclusivist ways that depreciate the suffering of others and close-off the past to the possibility of being transfigured or remembered *other-wise*.

As an alternative to competitive forms of memory, Rothberg proposes a model of 'multidirectional memory' that "cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal and cultural sites" to recognise

²⁹ *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

³⁰ Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma*, 95.

how histories of suffering are connected and “subject to ongoing cross-referencing, and borrowing.”³¹ Wounds don’t have to compete; they can also cross. As Rambo points out with reference to the risen Christ’s wounds:

“When the risen Jesus appears, his wounds provide a site of crossing, not by erasing the memory of crosses, but by bringing the memories together, not to erase them by folding them into one, but by making room for distinctive histories to be held... [T]he figure of wounds returning within the sphere of life is an evocative biblical symbol for the return and potential crossing of histories of suffering in our present time. This is a crossing in which pasts meet, traversing and potentially transfiguring each other. Histories of suffering can come together to cancel each other out, or they could meet, to discover that they are, at some level, touching.”³²

With these words we return, in a way, to Ramaphosa’s stitching together of the wounds of Jesus, Mama Winnie and “the wounds inflicted on all of us.” One of the consequences of the competitive climate in which wounds usually surface in South Africa, is that white people have difficulty acknowledging that the hidden wound of apartheid is also *our* wound, that apartheid has inflicted wounds on *all of us*. However, such “generous acts of remembrance,” as displayed by Ramaphosa in his eulogy, have the power to cut through the stifling air of distrust and suspicion, to reveal how our wounds are, across race, at some level, touching.³³ For this reason, God’s resurrection of wounds from cold isolated graves into communities of generous memory holds great promise, also for the DRCSA as we search for appropriate modes of witnessing to Christ’s reconciliation; for it is in the *touching* that wounds are transfigured from instruments of apartheid to vehicles of healing and new community.

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³¹ Cited in Rambo, 96.

³² Rambo, 98.

³³ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, 132.

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