Filmic Therapeutic Encounters and Resistance: Silence, Forgetting, and Guilt in the Face of Historical Violence

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Abstract
Mental disorder and therapeutic encounters are central aspects of three films that were groundbreaking in addressing collective trauma in the aftermath of slavery, colonialism, or genocide: Peele’s GET OUT (USA), Ruhorahoza’s GREY MATTER (Rwanda) and Mhando and Mulvihill’s MAANGAMIZI—THE ANCIENT ONE (Tanzania/USA). Recurring to theories of collective memory and trauma, the article assumes that asymmetric historical violence causes a crisis of reason among the victims, and that the affective dream-like technique of film has the potential to make unutterable mental conditions explicit and relatable without trivializing their complexities. Oppression is usually perpetuated by an alliance of domination with forgetting, silencing, and a sense of guilt, inflicted on the victims who are thereupon labeled as overly sensitive, moronic, or insane. The films depict mental conditions caused by collective trauma which are expressed by haunting memories, ancestral visions, or victims being possessed by their oppressors. A central element is the depiction of problematic therapeutic encounters which may be abusive, manipulative or turn the patient–therapist relation upside down. By challenging notions of therapy and critically addressing its potential

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embeddedness in power relations, it is argued, the films themselves serve as a form of postcolonial therapy and empowerment.

**Keywords**
consciousness, cultural psychology, humanistic psychology, meaning, mental disorder, posttraumatic growth, psychotherapy, racism, postcolonialism, genocide

This article discusses three films that depict problematic therapeutic encounters in the aftermath of the distinct, yet interlinked, historical contexts of colonialism, the Rwandan genocide, and racism in postslavery American society. Martin Mhando’s and Ron Mulvihill’s (2000) *Maangamizi—The Ancient One* (Tanzania/USA), Kivu Ruhorahoza’s (2011) *Grey Matter* (Rwanda), and Jordan Peele’s (2017) *Get Out* (USA) reflect complex mental entanglements of historical trauma in the aftermath of asymmetric violence which causes silencing, forces forgetting, and inflicts notions of guilt. Therapy takes conflicting stances, reaching from being complicit to forgetting and further victimization by making patients compliant to an ongoing system of oppression, to rebuilding their capacity to make sense and cope with their past and present.

**Film and Trauma**
Postcolonial psychiatrist Frantz Fanon has treated colonialism as a nervous condition, and by doing so expands its effects from the obvious economic and political atrocities to the mental realm. Scholars of both individual and collective trauma have pointed out that a central element of violence committed under asymmetric power relations is the destruction of an individual’s or group’s system of meaning, or as Fanon (1967) puts it the “liquidation of its systems of reference, the collapse of its cultural patterns” (p. 38), and thus of their capacity to make sense of their environment. On an individual level, such traumatic events “overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning,” and by doing so, “overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life” (Lewis Hermann, 1992/2015, p. 33). Similarly, for a collective to be oppressed in a colonial situation, Fanon states that

Expropriation, spoliation, raids, objective murder, are matched by the sacking of cultural patterns, or at least condition such sacking. The social panorama is
destructured; values are flaunted, crushed, emptied. The lines of force, having crumbled, no longer give direction. (Fanon, 1967, p. 33)

The system of the perpetrators has an interest to negate the victim’s existence (Fanon, 1961/2004) in terms of their way of reasoning, culture, and humanity which renders the experience of the oppressed unspeakable. Through silencing, suppressing, or forgetting, and the fact that those who survived are never able to tell the whole story, the traumatic events cause a “crisis of truth” (Caruth, 1995, p. 8; Felman, 1995) or a dissociation from reality as continuous state of being among the victims (Fanon, 1961/2004). Consequently, filmic representations of trauma often transcend realist storytelling and instead encompass mystical, fantastic, symbolic, or nonlinear narration.

By depicting therapeutic practices, relations and institutions, the films discussed in this article address the complexities of healing in the aftermath of traumatic events or under ongoing mental, physical, or political oppression. Doing so, they address manifestations of mental suffering linked to the effects of silencing, forgetting, and guilt feelings among the victims. Depelchin (2005) states that “Among those who have suffered enslavement, colonisation, steady and relentless economic exploitation, cultural asphyxiation, religious persecution, gender, race and class discrimination and political repression, silences should be seen as facts” (p. 3), an effect that is depicted in **MaangaMizi** by the main protagonist’s muteness and in **grey MaTTer** by the protagonist’s inability to express himself artistically. While silence can be seen as either the result of coercion or a form of resistance, an active refusal to comply with the forced system of reasoning in order to retain one’s sanity (Depelchin, 2005), or a seeking for an oppressed notion of reality, forgetting, is an effect explicitly complicit with the oppressor’s interest. As Lewis Herman (1992/2015) states, “the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator’s first line of defense” (p. 8). This is drastically depicted in **Get Out**, where the victims’ brains are literally removed with intent to appropriate their bodies. The experience of collective suffering is often perpetuated through a feeling of guilt among the survivors (Leys, 2007). While **grey MaTTer** depicts how this phenomenon reinforces the rupture within postconflict societies and among the victims, **MaangaMizi** proposes a potential of empowerment through active dealing with historical guilt among the survivors’ community.

Healing, the films suggest, is linked to empowerment, and takes place at the intersection of personal, social, and cultural processes. Central elements in the protagonists’ mental journeys are notions of collectivity, encounters, intersubjective relations, and solidarity. Prospects for healing and empowerment, or even resistance are represented to be bound to the protagonists’
ability to recuperate their potential to make meaning, see through imposed hegemonic ways of reasoning and to find means to express their experience of reality. For that reason, it is no surprise that besides the depiction of problematic therapeutic encounters, another central element of the films is the role of media and artistic forms of expression as means of unsilencing. Each work addresses the use and appropriation of audiovisual media (filming, photography, audio recording, and painting) as ways to tackle trauma, and by doing so implicitly also address their own critical role as films.

Scholars have pointed out the relatedness of different art and narrative forms with psychological phenomena. Caruth (1995) has prominently shown the impact of images in the psychological processing of trauma and Leys (2006) has emphasized the importance of a mimetic and nonliteral understanding thereof. Freud (1939) himself has widely recurred to literature and myth to demonstrate parts of his theory of the human psyche and collective trauma. Luckhurst (2008, 2018) discusses how popular cultural narratives have served to reveal psychological symptoms of certain epochs which would have been impossible to come to surface without their fictionalization. It has been found by many scholars and critics that film has a particular potential to address psychic realities and both personal and collective trauma, by articulating realities that cannot easily be rationalized and expressed in words alone. Kracauer (1947/2004) has prominently associated German film culture since the 1920s with a collective psyche which, he suggests, anticipated the rise of National Socialism. It is also Kracauer who identifies a film’s connectedness with both material and psychic realities. On the one hand, he argues that the latency of a film follows “actual dream patterns” (Kracauer, 1960/1997, p. 163). On the other hand, he ascribes to a film’s aesthetic qualities a particular closeness to the physical world. It is precisely the combination of its closeness to both concrete material reality and the unconscious which enables a film to address the unease and unsettledness oppressed collectives may experience regarding their existence in society. Combining different genres and borrowing elements from (sur)realism, mysticism, and symbolism, or Landsberg’s (2018) notion of “horror vérité,” films are able to address intersections of inner and outer realms where mental conditions become manifest. With particular focus to the African context, Mhando and Tomaselli (2009) suggest that a film evokes “experiences of encountering the ‘real’ through semiotic work that orders memory through the logic of fiction, documentary, or other cinematic forms.” (p. 31). All three films, I will show, make use of filmic devices to address experiences that are otherwise unspoken, and yet represent a central element of posttraumatic realities for those who have suffered asymmetric violence.
Grey Matter—Survivor Guilt and the Perpetuation of Trauma

The central theme of Grey Matter is the “circle of the cockroach,” a circle of trauma and violence in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. The cockroach was a derogatory image used against the Tutsis as an extreme form of othering and dehumanization. Grey Matter is among the first Rwandan genocide films which does not depict the actual atrocities committed but confines itself to portray them through their haunting aftermath (Cieplak, 2018), providing a “psychoanalytic study of interrelated forms of trauma” (Ekotto, 2013, p. 233). Doing so, it expresses criticism against the present Rwandan memory policies which are based on the doctrine of reconciliation and the propagation of Rwandan unity. With a president who actively participated in the armed liberation of Rwanda from the genocidal regime, himself a member of the Tutsi minority, the government puts emphasize on the constructed-ness of ethnic difference between Hutu and Tutsi, a division which roots back to the colonial divide and rule policy, and which is thematized in most international filmic adaptations on the genocide. Grey Matter, in contrast, joins critiques who bemoan that the official reconciliation policy, omits spaces to address trauma that results from the ethnic divide (Broderick, 2017; Dauge-Roth, 2010) or to pinpoint the warnings of reproduced ideologies of hatred on the perpetrator’s side.

This circle of violence, silence, and trauma is depicted in three interlinked episodes. The central film-in-film plot is framed by the story of a young director who desperately tries to find funding for a film on the genocide titled “the circle of the cockroach.” He is told by the national film commission that his film was “kind of irrelevant” to them and that he would do better to make films on HIV/AIDS education and gender-based violence. In his desperate attempt to plan the shoot notwithstanding, which he documents in a video diary, he starts seeing and hearing the scenes of the envisioned film before his inner eye in a dreamlike delirium. This first episode suggests that silencing is perpetuated through the limitations of expression which film makers face in telling mental realities. The fact that the main plot only appears in the form of visions in the director’s head hints at the haunting impact of untold stories. Director Ruhorahoza once described in an interview that for him, as a Rwandan artist, the genocide represented an “overwhelming reality” which he felt was “unavoidable” (Winthrop-King Institute at Florida State University, 2017) to deal with at an early stage of his career in order to be able to move on with other projects.

The visions lead over to the second episode, which depicts the mental realm of an incarcerated perpetrator. The highly symbolic, claustrophobic
scene plays entirely in the cell of a prison or mental institution, whereby the spatial confines reflect his inner mental condition, tainted by the recollection of ideological indoctrination. He relives and reenacts his violent fantasies by interacting with items on the wall which represent the anti-Tutsi racist ideology. The elements get revealed to the viewer one by one which evokes the impression that they are not actual applications on the wall but representations of mental relics in the captive’s mind for which the cell becomes a fragmented surrealist display. The cell, or his mental space, is not a closed circuit whatsoever. The captive regularly receives objects through hands (black and white) that reach into the cell from outside the barred window. They consist of objects which physically escalate his cruel delirium, like food, beer, pills, marihuana, a machete. He has sonic and visual memories of steps in the gras and machetes and addresses his hatred toward a cockroach which he holds captive in a jar, and which he ultimately symbolically rapes. The scene closes when he receives a key (handed in by a white man’s hand) with which he can leave the cell, which dramatically points at his undue rehabilitation.

The third episode which forms the central story centers on a pair of siblings, Justine and Yvan, living in the deserted house of their parents who fell victim to the genocide. Yvan who appears to be more obviously mentally affected continuously wears a motorcycle helmet, presumably to hide his wounds. He sees hallucinations of his sister being raped or his burning parents in different places of the compound, or even in the TV, which he then extinguishes with a bucket of water. He reenacts common survival strategies which those in hiding maintained during the genocide, like cooking avocados and hiding in the attic. In a conversation with Justine we learn that these are not his own immediate traumatic experiences, as he was out of the country for studies when the genocide happened. His symptoms do not directly correspond to the concrete events but reflect a combination of grief and a sense of survivor guilt (Leys, 2007).

Justine appears as the stronger one of the two, who manages their daily life, dedicated to help her brother. She sells sex services to a psychiatrist in exchange for prescriptions of medicine that mitigates his symptoms and haunting visions. Therapy here is part of the repressive system. Its methods appear to be ineffective and instead reproduce the sexual exploitation she had to experience during the genocide. After all, it is among others the imagination of the sexual violence his sister experienced that haunt Yvan. In one dialogue, when Yvan tells her about his visions of her being raped, she slaps him, denying the event. As the actual survivor she negates her memories, while the physically absent brother is haunted by imaginary recollections of the atrocities. The film presents a psychic realism distinct from positivist
factuality. Yvan’s acting out of mediated traumatic visions corresponds to Leys (2006) advocating for a mimetic instead of a literal understanding of traumatic imagery connected with survivor guilt. Despite his visions, he suffers from the fact that the actual events remain abstract to him which leaves him unable to find a means of expression. Having been an artist before the genocide, he tries to follow the therapist’s advice to paint, but is unable to capture his visions or proceed with a portrait of his sister for which she repeatedly poses. He only drafts her hair in a single tone but is unable to paint her face. His symptoms render him unreceptive for the surrounding reality and the recent suffering his sister endures, his lethargy forming part of the circle of violence.

The situation changes the day when the siblings attend the excavation of a mass grave which is assumed to hold the remains of their parents. Justine visits the therapist for a last time, providing her services in advance, as she declares, thus, ending the abusive relationship. She asks him to only come one last time if she calls him after the excavation and declares to her brother that she cannot afford any more medication for him. The excavation is the first time Yvan puts off his helmet which reveals that he was not hiding visible scars. As the two siblings stand at the margin of the grave, one of the men who dig disingenuously grins at them, suggesting that he might have been one of the perpetrators responsible for their parents’ killing. We recognize him as the now free captive from the cell, appointed to do communal work. The event marks a turning point in the siblings’ respective mental condition. It is only now through the direct confrontation with the physical location of the atrocity that Yvan gains strength, is able to paint his sister, and formulates a poem for her. Justine on the other hand seems distraught by the encounter at the grave and becomes increasingly apathetic.

The story tragically ends with Yvan dying of an electric shock when he tries to tidy up the house and Justine being hospitalized. In the final scene of the siblings’ plot, we see her lying in a bed in a sparse cell, similar to that of the perpetrator. As she apathetically stares, a cockroach disappears under the door toward a neighboring cell, where we see a hand, trapping it in a jar. The circle of the cockroach is once more closed. The symbolic image of the captured cockroach bears a strong criticism of a therapeutic environment where victim and perpetrator share the same institutional treatment, which leads to the perpetuation of a circle of violence and trauma.

Get Out—Possessed by the Oppressor

Get out problematizes multilayered forms of racism in the US postslavery society. A central theme is the perpetuation of oppression through mental
manipulation. Chris, a young Black photographer accompanies his white girlfriend Rose Armitage to her parents’ country house for the first time. While he seems to be welcomed cordially into the liberal family, his unease increases as he experiences their latent racism and, more important, the strange behavior of other Black people he encounters within the white environment. The film’s light, romantic tone changes into horror as it turns out that the family abducts Black people to implant white peoples’ brains in their bodies. The film expresses a strong critique of racist desire and subjugation of Black bodies (Henry, 2017; Jarvis, 2018) and, I will argue, discloses the role of trauma as a catalyst for either compliance or resistance.

A therapy session Chris undergoes with Rose’s mother Missy, a therapist, marks the core of the oppressive apparatus which he successively enters. As everything in the film starts seemingly harmless, the issue that gets Chris caught up in the hypnosis is his smoking habit. Missy’s use of his “drug abuse” to lure him into her custody alludes to the criminalization of Black people for minor misdemeanors as a substitute for explicitly racist persecution. After all, Chris is not treated because he smokes, but because he is Black and the new prey to the family’s barbarous undertaking. During the session, Missy digs into Chris’s childhood trauma, the tragic loss of his mother who bled to death after a car accident. Chris has not directly witnessed the event but feels guilty as he failed to call for help in time to save her when she went missing. Missy enhances his feeling of guilt. She hypnotizes him into a state of “heightened suggestibility” by hitting her tea cup with a spoon and commands him to “sink into the floor.” The state is visually depicted by Chris’s younger self sinking into the bed he sits on the night his mother died. The milieu of his childhood is carefully drafted through the imagery of a running TV and the reflection of rain on the wall of little Chris’s room. The scenery alludes to structural problems and mechanisms which cause the African American population’s collective vulnerability; a low-income household with a working single mother without access to child care and a Black environment where calling the police for help does not appear as an obvious choice to a child. Along with his young self, adult Chris mentally sinks into his seat and into “the sunken place,” an empty dark space of nothingness. He continuously falls with his eyes fixated to a small TV screen above him through which he sees his physical outer reality, while his body remains on the armchair in Missy’s office. The “sunken place,” we will later learn, corresponds with the state of percipline which a Black person experiences when their nervous system is still functional while their body is controlled by a white person’s implanted brain. A spectator of his own existence, he becomes an object to Missy’s commands. The symbol of the TV screen bears a critique of the manipulative and numbing effect of the medium that
captivates the spectator (little Chris) aloof of their actual reality. It is juxtaposed to the potential of adult Chris’s photography practice as an independent medium of expression that enables resistance. Although the family does not refrain from using physical violence in a later phase of their proceedings, it is only through the hypnosis that Chris becomes vulnerable enough to undergo the transplantation which requires a certain degree of mental compliance. The coaction of physical mutilation exceeded by Rose’s father, a surgeon, and Missy’s mental indoctrination combined with the element of affection, represented by girlfriend Rose, forms the elements of ongoing oppression.

Chris is confronted with his wounds but remains unable to process or heal, as he is left in a state of physical and mental paralysis. The “sunken place” represents an apathy Black Americans experience vis-à-vis open and subtle forms of ongoing racism. It is characterized by a distorted relation to reality perpetuated through a sense of guilt implanted on the foundation of a traumatic past. Chris’s traumatic experience is mostly suppressed in his daily life. While through Missy’s hypnosis it materializes in his realistic recollection of the situation he experienced in his room (the TV and rain), it also appears in a mimetic dimension in an earlier scene. When Rose hits a deer on their way to the country house, Chris strongly reacts to the wounded animal. The dying deer evokes in him the imagined memory of his mother’s death and serves as a harbinger of the impending threat. This way Chris’s sensibility for his traumatic experience serves as a warning and a potential base for resistance.

Another warning is expressed by his best friend Rod, with whom he regularly communicates on the phone, and who is suspicious of the white Armitages, from the beginning. Rod represents a caricatural incarnation of an African American who scents conspiracy in everything and draws seemingly absurd conclusions, contributing to the controversial labeling of the film as a comedy (Kohn, 2017). However, Rod turns out to be the only one who comes to a realistic assessment of Chris’s situation by representing a common sense that appears preposterous but is in fact adequate to the outrageousness of the oppressive system; a common sense that Chris has forfeit through Missy’s hypnosis. It is the combination of Rod’s suspicious common sense and Chris’s sensitivity for his fellow Blacks, expressed in his photographic work which outs the Armitages’ complot.

Chris has learned to use photography as a way to capture and express his and his peers’ life reality in the still exclusionist society they live in. His ability to see through the lens represents a way to introspectively scrutinize his own community, and his ability to deduct from their aloofness that something is alarming about their surroundings. He realizes the strange behavior of the other Black people he encounters at the Armitages’ house, namely their
domestic worker, their gardener, and the partner to an elderly lady who attends the family’s garden party. The latter strikes Chris for his “white” way of dressing, speaking, and acting, which reminds of an exaggerated form of colonial mimicry (Bhabha, 1994). Puzzled by his strange appearance, Chris takes a picture of him with his mobile phone, causing the photographed to break out of his white existence. Shocked by the flash he attacks Chris with the words “get out!” Perplexed, Chris sends the picture to Rod, who identifies him as Andre (“Dre”) Hayworth, a Black man who recently went missing. The visual proof confirms Rod’s suspicions and allows him to draw the right conclusions which will eventually save his friend’s life. Although captured at the “sunken place,” being seen and documented by a peer, serves Dre as an act of self-realization and a sudden awakening of his almost but not quiet buried senses. Or, as Jarvis (2018) puts it: “As sight becomes the primary means by which the world makes sense of the individual, it becomes the primary means by which the individual makes sense of the world; the visual becomes ontological” (p. 105). Leys (2006) describes how, in the context of torture, a 1983 manual for CIA agents advises to leave the subject unaware of any audio or video recording, as the likeliness of his compliance would be enhanced if “the captive is oblivious of being heard or seen by anyone other than the investigator-aggressor” (p. 148). Chris’s photographic gaze, his ability to see his community, causes Dre to rerealize his suppressed existence which cannot be entirely deleted through neither physical mutilation nor hypnosis, and by doing so forms the fundament for resistance and solidarity.

Maangamizi—From Silence to Empowerment

The magical-realist film Maangamizi—The Ancient One explores the interwovenness of personal and collective trauma and the potentials of healing and forgiveness through the confrontation with problematic pasts among the victims of colonialism. Forgiveness however is not advocated for in regard to the external aggressor but among members of the victimized community and among communities with shared traumatic experiences. A U.S.–Tanzanian coproduction directed by American Ron Mulvihill and Tanzanian Martin Mhando, and with a script written by African American writer Queenae Taylor-Mulvihill, the story promotes Pan-African solidarity and sisterhood. The personal story of a Tanzanian patient and her relation to the personally engaged African American therapist is a metaphor for shared collective traumata resulting from the experience of colonialism and slavery. Therapy becomes a way of healing only by turning the roles of therapist and patient upside down which is facilitated by the spirit of Maangamizi who metaphorically symbolizes the shared ancestry of the two women.
Samehe (forgiveness in Kiswahili) lives in a mental hospital in the small Tanzanian coastal town of Bagamoyo and has not spoken in years but has visions of her dead grandmother Maangamizi (destruction). Afro-American psychiatrist Dr Asira (anger), who comes as an exchange doctor, is captivated by the strange patient. Her endeavor to introduce a new form of therapy including hypnosis and psychoanalysis is met with rejection by the nurses and her superior Dr Moshi (smoke), whose treatment is limited to the prescription of medication that keeps the patients at bay. While throughout the encounter with the therapist, Samehe manages to face her traumatic past and gain back her voice, Dr Asira finds herself in a fragile mental state the more she gets engaged in Samehe’s case.

At the beginning of the therapeutic encounter, the reappearing spirit of Maangamizi encourages the reluctant patient to open up to Dr Asira, as hypnosis turns out to be an alternative way to access the ancestors. It allows Samehe to travel back to her childhood, when her young self witnessed how her father, an early fanatic Christian believer, burned her mother alive for her adhering to ancestral believes. After having visualized or reexperienced the traumatic event, Samehe continues her spiritual journey to the present, where she encounters her parents’ spirits. Her father burns in a fire alluding to the Christian hell, pleading for redemption which only Samehe and her mother can grant him. Speaking with Fanon (1961/2004), he represents those who have succumbed to the wrong consciousness of colonial indoctrination, resulting in the reproduction of colonial violence by the oppressed. Her mother whom she finds at an old cemetery lying in ruins, has become an angry spirit unready for forgiveness, wearing a clay mask that hides her burned face. She blames the father for having betrayed their culture and confesses that the only reason why she has not destroyed everything was the existence of her daughter Samehe and the unborn child she was carrying when she was burned. The mother represents the damaged society and reference system of a colonized culture. Although she adheres to precolonial values, she is unable to transform and adapt them to the changing circumstances and, instead, turns them into their opposite, bitterness and anger. With regard to technology, Fanon (1967) has problematized that in colonized societies the bound to tradition is limited to “living it as a defense mechanism,” whereby it “is not reconceived, grasped anew, dynamized from within” (p. 42).

Regarding their reaction to colonial destruction, father and mother represent two opposite extremes. Complete adaptation and succumbing, which reproduces colonial ignorance and violence, in the father’s case, and stagnation with the lifeless remains of traditional culture that is no longer functional, in the mother’s case. Both together keep the colonized subject and succeeding generations captive and produce Samehe’s subaltern silence.
Surrounded by the father’s violence, the mother’s agony, and the westernized institution’s medication that aims to make forget, she has lost any referential system that would allow her to heal. Therapy here serves to engage with opposing reactions to asymmetrical oppression and enables to reconcile conflicting poles within the damaged society. It allows to cope with the complex of victimhood and guilt and thus allows for a form of coping with trauma that avoids mental divide-and-rule. This way, it is a form of coping with the past that is directed toward the present and bears the potential to empowerment within the status quo of ongoing oppression.

Samehe’s healing is not an end in itself but also fosters the healing of the healer. Throughout the therapy, Dr Asira experiences visions of her own traumatic past, when she witnessed the lynching of her grandmother. While at the beginning, the spirit Maangamizi became an ally to the therapist to break the patient’s silence, it later speaks to the puzzled therapist through the patient. As Samehe becomes more and more aware of the power that lies in her roots, the patient, possessed by the grandmother’s spirit, authoritatively speaks to the therapist and is the one to guide her through her own healing. The role reversal becomes manifest when Asira, realizing that she has become the center of the therapy session, turns off the audio recorder, but Samehe switches it back on, indicating that it is her who has taken over control of the means to write history, and that their stories are inseparably linked. The connection between the two women, that is between the African and the African American experience, becomes symbolically manifested when, in one of the hypnosis sessions, the spirit of Samehe’s mother recognizes Asira as the unborn child she was carrying during her tragic death. Maangamizi is at the same time the spirit of Asira’s lynched grandmother, which, in a nonliteral sense, stresses the empowerment of repossessing the shared past of the oppressed.

Samehe is only able to break her silence with the help of the otherworldly link to the past, personified by her grandmother’s spirit, in combination with the worldly connection to another individual, her therapist, who is able to understand due to her own related suffering. Maangamizi suggests that healing is enabled through the combination of an inward journey to the suppressed trauma and the sharing of the experiences with another personally engaged individual.

**Film as Therapy**

By depicting conflicting therapeutic encounters, the three films offer different perspectives on the problematics of healing in the aftermath of colonialism, slavery, and genocide. By tackling personal and collective trauma through
therapeutic relations and environments, they address mental mechanisms of ongoing oppression as well as potentials for empowerment. The use of filmic elements such as surrealism, horror, and symbolism allows to depict mental realities which are otherwise unutterable due to ongoing suppression, silencing, forced forgetting, and complexes of survivor guilt. The unreliability of time, space, and common sense experienced by victims of asymmetric historical violence and their descendants is represented by the use of nonlinear, nonrealist, and magical narratives. Putting the protagonists’ use of artistic and audiovisual technologies in the center provides a reflexive approach to films’ and other media’s role in cultural healing and transcending the hegemonic silencing of psychic realities. Actual healing, it is suggested, is bound to unravelling circles of oppression, unsilencing, and acts of solidarity and reconciliation among members of the oppressed community, enabled by the ability of introspective observation and artistic expression which is, in this case provided by the filmic medium itself.

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