

Response

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Writing as resilience. Writing as resistance. Writing resists forgetting. It resists erasure. To write – to pick up a pen or a pencil and to hold it in your hand, fingers curled around it to keep it there then to move it across the page to say – to write down, to be your own witness, to bear witness to yourself, to be the testament to your life – your precious wonderful life – to write down this happened, this happened, this and then this, and I survived, I lived, I tell the tale – that is resistance. To write you tell of a time when time was stopped, when you were stopped in the journey of your day. You write to tell of time that was stood still – of clocks stopped – by the man who raped. You. Me. The men who raped. That stopped time is the burden we carry. This leaden, sharp-cornered thing that the rapist thrusts into our arms and which we are forced to carry from room to room, from house to house, from city to city. The rooms, houses and cities of our hearts. It must be carried from moment to moment, the moments that make up the minutes and hours and days and years of our time. Our rape-stopped time. This shattered time: the time that shattered. This terrible cutting thing is carried until you/we/I/us – which pronoun to use – put it down to write. Because to write you/we/I/us must free one hand. You/we/I/us loosen your/our/my grip on this thing that I confuse with myself. You/we/I/us write against the obliteration of the self.

To pick up a pen or a pencil – anything that makes a mark – I must open the palm of my hand. Uncurl the fist that held me together all this time and write down: this happened. And this. And this. And I was there. You were there. You/we/I/us were all there when you/we/I/us were most alone.

Writing, this writing, is resistance. Writing says, ‘I am here.’ Writing says, ‘I survived.’ Writing knows I am a miracle. You/we/I/us are miracles. Writing is the mirror you/we/I/us hold up to ourselves to show that you/we/I/us live and love and create. Writing says to the man who was so filled with his own death, his own failure to be human, that he set out to batter, hammer, inflict his rage and his violence into you/we/I/us. Into this lovely, living, loving body that is yours and mine to keep and to share only if and when you/we/I/us choose.

Writing is reclamation. When you write you say, ‘I reclaim myself.’ You say, ‘I return to myself.’ You say, ‘I returned to myself then, when I was abandoned – in a shadowy rondavel, on a grassy afternoon hillside, in my own bedroom.’ Writing says, ‘I stand alongside my wounded, stolen self.’ Writing says, ‘I see myself, my human self with all her rights and joys and freedoms that were taken in that unendurable time of rape.’

Writing is solidarity with all of you/we/I/us who survive. And those who did not. This writing is a gift to all of us who must reassemble ourselves, who must collect the beautiful, broken pieces of ourselves and carefully reassemble them. This writing is the glue that adheres piece to piece, heart to heart, life to life. This writing sutures the wound that divides the past from the present. This writing is a slender golden thread that weaves a future in which we are whole. These words show where you/we/I/us fractured and broke and lived on in these words you/we/I/us put down in writing.

In the words that form from the lines of the verses and chapters and books with which we write down – resisting and resilient – the worst things that are done in this

land, things that are done daily in this land, done everywhere in this land – out in the open, behind quiet walls, to silenced bodies – you/we/I/us say, ‘Stop’. We say, ‘No’. This writing breaks the silence. It says to us, ‘Look. See me. Hear me. Know what happened to me. Know that I am one of you and that you are of me. Know that if one of us is broken then we all are.’

This writing denies the rapist, the father with an iron fist, the gun with its bullets. This writing says, ‘I have lived. I have told the tale.’ This writing is resistance. This writing is resilience. This writing is the record of what it takes to be a woman, to be a girl, to be human, to be beautiful, to live.

This writing breaks the heart.