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Seeking Asylum, Speaking Silence

Speech, Silence and Psychosocial Trauma in Beverley Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth*

Abstract: "How could she ever put the terrible pictures in her head into words?" (Naidoo, Truth 51). This question is at the heart of Beverley Naidoo's The Other Side of Truth (2000), which narrates the trauma of Nigerian asylum seeker children Sade and Femi as they flee to Britain. Speech and silence are ambivalent within the text, fluctuating in meaning dependant on the social context in which they are enacted. Showing this text to be primarily a narrative of activism, I explore how Naidoo's representations of trauma inform her critique of the British immigration system. This text invites a reading that draws on recent postcolonial theories of trauma. Using both textual and paratextual analysis of the novel and Naidoo's archive, held by Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books in Britain, I draw on Greg Forster's model of psychosocial trauma to demonstrate that the trauma the protagonists face is a result of their encounter with a racist society and bureaucracy. Reflecting Adrienne Kertzer's claim that social justice should be central in trauma narratives for children, Naidoo shows healing from trauma to be the locus of political awakening for both characters and implied reader. The aim of this article is to integrate contemporary models of postcolonial trauma with an understanding of the activist nature of Naidoo's work, showing that in this sort of children's trauma narrative, the site of healing from trauma is simultaneously the site of social change. Since the trauma that the child protagonists face is a social phenomenon, the speech that allows the children to begin to heal is similarly socially situated, and their healing is synonymous with social justice.

Keywords: refugees, asylum seekers, postcolonial trauma, archives, institutional violence, immigration, displaced children, activism, social justice

“How could she ever put the terrible pictures in her head into words?” (Naidoo, *Truth* 51). This inwardly directed question, framed by protagonist Sade, is at the heart of Beverley Naidoo’s *The Other Side of Truth* (2000). Narrating the trauma that Sade and her brother Femi experience as they flee from Nigeria to London as asylum seekers, this text represents the shifting ethical value of speech and silence, dependant on the social context within which it is enacted. Silence is at times a symptom of Sade’s trauma, a survival strategy, and a cause of further trauma. Speech is similarly ambivalent; it can be empowering and traumatising for the children in this text. In its critique of the British immigration system, *The Other Side of Truth* represents the socially situated traumas of displacement and systemic racism. While conveying the difficulty of speech in the context of trauma, this text shows a type of speech that is healing when performed in the service of social change. The aim of this article is to integrate contemporary models of postcolonial trauma with an understanding of the activist nature of Naidoo’s work, showing that in this sort of children’s trauma narrative, the site of healing from trauma is also the site of social change. Using the work of Frantz Fanon, I explore how the colonial dynamics of the British immigration system are themselves traumatising. Building on models of trauma in children’s literature established by Adrienne Kertzer and Donnarae MacCann, I heed the call for a “model of trauma which – unlike the traditional individual and event-based model – can account for and respond to collective, ongoing, everyday forms of traumatizing violence” (Craps 4). Contextualising the novel within its paratext, taken from materials held in Naidoo’s archive at Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children’s Books in Britain, I explore how speech becomes both the locus of healing and of political identity formation for the child protagonists. This text and paratext map the “psychosocial” causes of trauma for the displaced child (Forster 80), representing healing from trauma as synonymous with social justice, and with political identity formation for both the characters and the implied reader.

Considering the representation of trauma in the novel as a socially situated and constructed phenomenon, I use various paratextual sources to contextualise *The Other Side of Truth* within the author’s life and work, to explore its ambivalent position as a postcolonial text, and to trace Naidoo’s authorial choices in representing the traumas specific to child asylum seekers in Britain. All of these sources are taken from the peritext of the published novel, or from Naidoo’s archive held at Seven Stories. Donated by her in 2016, it contains records of her anti-apartheid and anti-racist activism, research into

racial bias in children's books, development and drafts of her novels and picture books, reader responses and correspondence. This archive bears witness to a life spent writing about and for children, representing Naidoo as someone eager to lend her voice to those that have been silenced. Archives can be rich repositories of institutional power, imperfect analogues for memory, and the sites of much curatorial and creative labour (Derrida and Prenowitz; Sánchez-Eppler; Steedman). Occupying all of these roles, this archive "reveals how Naidoo began to think about telling her story" (Sands-O'Connor), as much as it does of the story itself, and it is with this understanding that I tease out the ambivalent representations of speech and silence in this text.

The Other Side of Truth

Awarded the British Carnegie Medal for children's literature in 2000, *The Other Side of Truth* is focalised through the viewpoint of Sade, a 12-year-old Nigerian girl who seeks asylum in Britain with her younger brother Femi. From a Yoruba family, their father is a journalist, and an active critic of the military Abacha government of 1993–1998. When an attempt to assassinate him goes wrong, killing the children's mother, the children are flown to London with a smuggler on false passports. Their father follows, spending the majority of the novel in a British detention centre; he is released after the children get his story on the national news. The children face racist school bullies, the immigration and foster care systems, and the possibility of their father's deportation, and must choose to whom it is safe to reveal their story.

Described in an early draft as "a story about the abuse of children through the official refugee process," this novel is political in its concern with the effect of government action and policy on children and its positioning of children as participants in civic life (Naidoo, "Themes and Ideas" 1). The novel functions as a protest against the difficulties facing young asylum seekers in Britain, and offers the implied reader the possibility of enacting a similar protest. Naidoo valorises the role of children's literature in its capacity to weigh in on political issues, framing speech as both a token of psychological healing and a political act.

Silence appears in *The Other Side of Truth* in two distinct ways. Firstly, it is the absence of speech, which is both a function of trauma, and a mechanism "for survival when life is threatened or under surveillance" (Mallan 44). Roi Wagner explains that silence is

not always a state of “ontological annihilation” but can appear as “embodied actions in the world” (100). Using false passports and withholding their names and story from Britain authorities, Sade’s silence is an act of “micro-political resistance” to the structures of the British immigration bureaucracy (Wagner 100), but also compounds her trauma, undermining her moral code and preventing her from narrating her loss. Secondly, there is a structural silence around the experiences of child refugees in Britain that the novel speaks into.

Speech is similarly ambivalent. The children’s eventual ability to tell their story on television signals both the beginning of their healing from trauma, and the beginning of social change. Their father is eventually released from detention, and awareness is raised of the conditions facing asylum seekers arriving in Britain. However, the empowering potential of speech is questioned, as the “other side” of Papa’s commitment to free speech is the trauma that this causes his family. This tension between speech and silence shows that rather than a fixed value, the ethical quality of silence and speech shifts depending on its social context.

Psychosocial Trauma and Social Justice

In her influential work on literary trauma theory, Cathy Caruth draws on the work of Freud to describe trauma as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind,” which “returns to haunt the survivor later on” (3–4). Provoked by an ethical turn in critical theory, various models of trauma arose chiefly in response to the Holocaust, describing trauma as a psychological condition marked by the recurrence of an event in the psyche of the sufferer that demands to be known and yet is unutterable (Felman and Laub; LaCapra). This struggle with speech is at the heart of *The Other Side of Truth*, as is a preoccupation with wounding and haunting. Sade’s question, “How could she ever put the terrible pictures in her head into words?” (Naidoo, *Truth* 51), describes the inarticulacy of the memory of her mother’s death by shooting outside their Lagos home. Caruth describes traumatic events that cannot be “fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (91). These “terrible pictures” haunt Sade’s dreams, and the image of the “growing dark red monster” (Naidoo, *Truth* 104) recurs as the moment of wounding, signifying both her mother’s fatal wound and the wound of Sade’s rupture from her home.

Within the last two decades, alternatives to this classic model of trauma have been developed. Caruth’s model, though useful, has been critiqued for proposing a universal framework for cultural-

ly specific phenomena. Roger Luckhurst argues that the focus on the single traumatic event fails “to address atrocity, genocide and war” (213). Often called “second-wave” trauma theory, recent years have seen a proliferation of new models with “a renewed focus on trauma’s specificity and the processes of remembering” (Balaev 2). Whilst the event of the mother’s death can be read using the classic model, the trauma that the children suffer as asylum seekers in Britain must be read as a function of their ongoing social reality.

This renewed focus on the specificity of trauma has led to an exploration of the trauma of empire, in that “the potential for traumatization is a constitutive feature of colonial (race) relations, inasmuch as these are always and everywhere relations of domination” (Forster 70). Sade and Femi’s secondary trauma results from their encounter with the British immigration system and the silence that Sade chooses as a result; these relations of domination compound the trauma of their mother’s death. Greg Forster’s concept of “psycho-social trauma” (80) is key to understanding this secondary trauma, defining their trauma as a result of their social surroundings, rather than of a single event.

For Stef Craps, the founding texts of trauma theory, despite their interest in cross-cultural witness, “marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures” (2). Craps addresses racism as a source of everyday and continuous trauma (26), exploring models such as “postcolonial syndrome” (Duran et al.) and “oppression-based trauma” (Spanierman and Poteat). The trauma that both children suffer as a result of their encounter with the British immigration system is an example of Maria Root’s “insidious trauma” (240), a term used by Craps to describe the trauma of “covert, subtle, ambiguous, and complex racist incidents operating at institutional and cultural levels” (26). When Sade collapses at school, the doctor’s words, “it must have been all too much to cope with” (Naidoo, *Truth* 287), are an acknowledgement of the physical effects of the trauma Sade has suffered since her arrival in Britain.

For MacCann and Kertzer, it is crucial that trauma narratives for children locate trauma in the social. Kertzer argues that a “plea for justice” is crucial in trauma narratives for children (208), whilst for MacCann, “protest movements are born to confront trauma [and] children have often been key players in such struggles” (185). Tracing the psychosocial trauma of displacement, and viewing protest for social change as a part of ameliorating this trauma, allows for a move towards a model of trauma that sees displacement, racism, parental separation, and state bureaucracy as traumatising in themselves. This enables an analysis of trauma in *The Other Side of Truth*

that looks for the intersections between the psychological and the political, and sees psychological healing as commensurable with social change.

The Trauma of Empire and the Limits of the Postcolonial

The real backdrop of *The Other Side of Truth* is the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and 8 fellow activists in 1995, against a backdrop of exploitative oil extraction practices by Shell Oil in the Ogoni region of Nigeria, and government suppression of protest. Explained in snippets by various characters, this context is revealed in the peritext: “the characters in this story are all fictional. However, we hear about [...] political figures who were real people. Ken Saro-Wiwa was a well-known Nigerian writer. [...] He was hanged with eight others in November 1995” (Naidoo, *Truth*, author’s note). This grounding in real historical events offers the implied reader new knowledge, and a sense of the “authenticity” of the text. *The Other Side of Truth* both invites and resists a postcolonial reading, and an aspect of this tension is Naidoo’s status as an outsider to the community whose viewpoint she is representing. Whilst I agree with Sivashankar et al. that “it is necessary to complicate and reframe our understanding of cultural authenticity beyond the outsider/insider binary” (3), in addressing traumatic silences it is important to look to the text for the stories that are heard, and those that are silenced.

Naidoo was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1943. Growing up in a wealthy white family, in much of the epitextual material she describes her childhood as happy but “blinkerred,” and her time at Witwatersrand University as a time of political awakening (Naidoo, “Little Hands”). Briefly jailed for anti-apartheid protest (“Citation” 3), her move to Britain to teach was made straightforward by her British heritage. Having married a South African Indian, and criticised the apartheid regime with the British Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, she speaks of herself as an exile from her country of birth: “I feel both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ both in South Africa and in Britain” (“ITV” 4). She draws on her own experiences in explaining her affinity with the asylum seekers she writes about: “Although I did not consciously set out to explore what had been my own experience of exile, I think it does come through in the way Sade’s mind involuntarily returns to her home, family, country” (“ITV” 2). This implies that writing this novel helped her overcome some trauma of her own. However, in tying herself to her characters, Naidoo is also leveraging her experience of exile to reinforce the authenticity of her representations.

Naidoo positions Britain as a site of postcoloniality, in that she depicts the nation as a multi-racial space, a nation whose colonial history and aftermath are visible in the movement of people. Leela Gandhi suggests that “an ethics of departure” is key to postcolonial thought, in its solidarity with the fugitive, the escaped slave, the pacifist, and the refugee (192). It is this ethics that *The Other Side of Truth* narrates in its protest against the dehumanising practices of the British immigration system. Britain’s colonial history and postcolonial present features as both presence and absence in *The Other Side of Truth*. Sade recalls listening to the BBC World Service and reading the Oxford English Dictionary; there is never a question of them seeking asylum anywhere but Britain, and in response to taunts from bullies about the quality of her English, she responds: “we have lots of languages. One of them is English” (Naidoo, *Truth* 163). The effects of centuries of British colonialism and occupation echo beyond Nigeria’s independence in 1960, and whilst these echoes of Nigeria’s history as a British colony are visible to a reader who knows what they are looking for, they are never contextualised. Published by children’s imprint Puffin, we can presume the implied reader of the novel to be living in Britain and speaking English, even if they do not identify as British; these details then have the effect of making Sade relatable to this implied reader. However, it is taken for granted that Britain and Nigeria have a linked present, without exploring their connected past.

A postcolonial reading of this text is limited by these silences, but the preoccupation in *The Other Side of Truth* with speech, silence, and the policing of borders nonetheless makes the work of Frantz Fanon useful here. His articulation of the psychological effects of French colonialism prefigures second-wave trauma theory (Durrant; Saunders; Craps), and can be mapped on to the colonial dynamics at work in postcolonial Nigeria and Britain.

Addressing psychological conditions encountered in his own practice, Fanon sees the root of these afflictions in the damage done to the sense of self of the colonised person: “a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: ‘In reality, who am I?’” (Fanon, *Wretched* 250). The trauma of this objectification is expressed further in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986); Fanon describes himself as “sealed into that crushing objecthood,” upon perceiving himself as the object of the racist white gaze on his first trip to France (82). The negating self-consciousness which the white gaze produces

is wounding to the psyche. This is the sort of trauma that Sade and Femi experience as they are processed through the foster care and immigration system, and face racist bullies at school.

The Trauma of Speech

As the title indicates, a key concern of this novel is the link between trauma and speech, and the potential of speech both to induce and to heal trauma, and to be smothered by the traumatic event. Correspondence between Naidoo and a Nigerian friend regarding an early draft entitled “Dare to Tell” includes a list of possible alternative titles including “The Other Side of Truth” and the remark: “I feel the title should emphasise the pain associated with the truth Baba insisted on reporting” (Tinu 3).¹ Papa’s critique of the Nigerian government is a liberating act: “Papa had been writing about [Saro-Wiwa] and the other Ogoni leaders locked up in jail. Papa’s newspaper had been protesting for months that the Brass Buttons weren’t going to give them a fair trial” (Naidoo, *Truth* 114). As represented by Papa, fairness is a core ethical value of this text, and Papa’s speech marks him out as a heroic figure. This is an instance of the “ethics of departure” described by Gandhi, whereby the text stands in solidarity with the right of citizens to protest against the actions of governments (192). However, his insistence upon fairness becomes a source of trauma for his children, as Sade articulates: “she hadn’t chosen to come. [...] Why did Papa have to write all those things that upset the Brass Button generals?” (Naidoo, *Truth* 292). By changing the title from “Dare to Tell” to *The Other Side of Truth*, Naidoo is drawing out the novel’s ambivalence towards speech, rather than simply valorising speech as heroic. Silence is not always a symptom of trauma in this text; often silence is as empowering as speech, allowing Sade to exercise some autonomy.

The novel opens with the traumatic event:

Papa is kneeling in the driveway, Mama partly curled against him. One bare leg stretches out in front of her. His strong hands grip her, trying to halt the growing scarlet monster. But it has already spread down her bright white nurse’s uniform. It stains the earth all around them.

A few seconds, that is all. Later, it will always seem much longer.

(Naidoo, *Truth* 2)

This passage, and other sections narrating dreams and flashbacks, is italicised and in the present continuous tense. Whilst the rest of the narrative occurs linearly in the past tense, this opening section rep-

resents a different temporality. “*Later, it will always seem much longer*” indicates a psychological state in which her mother’s death is not simply a past event but a present recurrence. In her waking hours Sade is able to “slam down the shutter in her brain” to repress the memory of her mother’s murder (Naidoo, *Truth* 43), but the opening paragraphs of the novel reappear almost word for word in traumatic flashbacks and nightmares at key points in the novel. Inexpressible in her waking hours, the trauma of her mother’s murder returns in sleep, becoming interwoven with her present circumstances and causing a collapse of the linear narrative.

Children in the British Immigration System

Femi is doubly silent; his inner world is inaccessible to Sade’s narrative perspective, and his trauma seems to resist speech. Sade notices on the day that they register for asylum that “for the last few days, he had hardly even spoken to her,” refusing to show an interest in things he used to enjoy (Naidoo, *Truth* 127). Discussing her work in retrospect, Naidoo has described how “words help [Sade] deal with the huge stress and challenges they face, unlike her brother Femi whose anger and confusion is locked inside him” (“Puffin Club”). Sade’s ability to narrate her story offers release, but there is a tension between the text and paratext here. The relationship between speech and silence is more complex than indicated by this piece for the Puffin Club. When Femi breaks his silence, it is not empowering, but generates further trauma. The children are told that they must be fingerprinted to receive their temporary admission papers:

Femi, who had been silent for most of the journey, broke his silence.
‘Do they think we are thieves?’ he muttered fiercely.
‘Many people say that children should not be fingerprinted,’ said
Mr Nathan quietly. ‘But I’m afraid the rules allow it.’
(Naidoo, *Truth* 134)

Mr Nathan is the novel’s voice of protest at this practice, standing in for the “many people” who argue that the immigration system – “the rules” – undermines the personhood of child asylum seekers. Femi’s fear that they are judged to be thieves signposts the criminalisation of young black male asylum seekers that hangs over him in Britain, a cause of the sort of “insidious trauma” that results from systemic racism. This is the sort of objectification that prompts the “in reality, who am I?” that Fanon articulates (*Wretched* 250). Femi is robbed of

the capacity to know himself. Being externally defined as a potential criminal is traumatising for Femi.

Lunar House, the Asylum Screening Unit in Croydon, London, appears in the novel as “grey concrete and glass [that] soared upwards like a cannon aimed at the clouds” (Naidoo, *Truth* 131). This militaristic “cannon,” aiming outwards, foresees the asylum seekers as an incoming enemy that will not be made welcome. This is where Sade and Femi begin the process to be granted refugee status, whereby according to British law they would be granted leave to remain in the country. Naidoo has written about her own visit to Lunar House whilst researching the novel:

Once inside Lunar House’s Screening Unit, I simply sat and watched the ebb and flow of people being called by number to a kiosk window ... feeling the suppressed tension in this bleak room in which life decisions were being determined. (Naidoo, “Open University” 7)

The bleakness of this epitextual description indicates the traumatising potential of the asylum process, since it strips asylum seekers of any knowledge of or control over the path their lives will take.

Naidoo’s archive at Seven Stories preserves a blue ticket for the queue to Lunar House, which simply reads “your turn is 957” (“Your turn”). The absence of context accompanying this ticket in the archive mirrors the larger structural silence concealed by the number “957,” which erases the story of the real asylum seeker(s) associated with the ticket. The story and subjectivity of an individual or family is reduced to a number, to a place in a queue, in order to be processed through the immigration system. This blue ticket points to the sort of institutional record-keeping which for Femi is traumatising. Compounding the trauma of their mother’s death, their displacement from Nigeria, and the moral disorientation caused by Sade’s chosen silence, this psychosocial trauma results from the children’s encounter with a state bureaucracy that does not recognise their personhood.

The dislocation in Femi’s sense of self and resulting insidious trauma is something Sade also experiences. Told by a social worker that they will be able to apply for refugee status, Sade responds internally: “Refugees? They were those winding lines of starving people, with stick thin children ... trying to escape famine and war. You saw them on the television. Were she and Femi really refugees?” (Naidoo, *Truth* 115). Sade’s re-examination of her identity in light of media stereotypes of refugees causes a dislocation at the realisation

of her own objectified status. The effect of being a Nigerian child in the former colonial centre is another manifestation of this insidious trauma. As Fanon discusses, realising oneself as the object of another's gaze is a traumatic experience for Sade, in that her unique story and subjectivity is silenced.

Silence, Survival, and Agency

Silence is a site of tension in *The Other Side of Truth*. Sade's silence is at times a psychological defence mechanism: when first questioned by a social worker "it was as if another blanket had been thrown over her, smothering her voice" (Naidoo, *Truth* 124). Her lack of speech is not a choice here. Mirroring the scene in which she and Femi must hide under a blanket as they are smuggled in a car to Lagos airport, Sade's silence is out of her control, and yet is a safety mechanism to shield her from danger. She reflects on her decision to withhold their real surname from the British social workers:

Conflicting thoughts raced through her brain. Part of her wanted to tell Mama Appiah the whole truth, including that she had given Iyawo-Jenny a false surname. But fear stopped her. When Papa was safely in England, then it would be different. [...] Until then it was better that they were Sade and Femi Adewale. (Naidoo, *Truth* 125)

She goes from being passive, being stopped by fear, to choosing silence. Sade exercises agency, taking control of her silence to turn it into an embodied action. This complicates the idea that silence is the result of trauma, and something that is out of the sufferer's control. If silence can be a choice, then while trauma impacts a child's agency, it does not obliterate it.

This tension between trauma and choice, between victimhood and agency, pertains to the status of *The Other Side of Truth* as a children's book. Adrienne Kertzer argues that "our conception of trauma as something over which we have no control ... continues to conflict with our insistence that stories offer child readers narratives of choice" (213). The assertion in *The Other Side of Truth* of the agency of the children despite the trauma of their displacement is crucial to this novel's status as a narrative of protest. As a text which seeks ultimately to inform the political consciousness of its implied reader, *The Other Side of Truth* cannot allow the traumatic silence to have the last word. This requires a nuanced model of trauma which foregrounds the agency, rather than the silencing, of the traumatised subject.

However, this agency is nonetheless ambivalent, as shown by Sade internalised parental voice: “what should they do when the questions started again? Mama always said, *Truth keeps the hand cleaner than soap*. Yet look what trouble had come through Papa writing the truth in his newspaper” (Naidoo, *Truth* 108). Mama’s proverbs appear throughout the novel, populating Sade’s inner world and informing her morality. In a brief description of *The Other Side of Truth* for an editor, Naidoo has written that “it is Mama and Papa’s voices – their sayings and stories that Sade carries in her head – that help in her search to make sense of her experience” (“For Sue A.”). However, once again the text complicates this statement, depicting this parental voice as a source both of guidance and of conflict. Sade has internalised her mother’s voice, which communicates a strict moral code and becomes the mouthpiece both for Sade’s survivor’s guilt and for the pain associated with Papa’s speech and her own lies. We see this moral disorientation conveyed in the phrase “cleaner than soap,” indicating that Sade feels she has dirtied herself by her lies.

This shame constitutes a secondary trauma, as Naidoo interweaves it with the traumatic dreams of Mama’s death to include appearances from racist school bullies: “Sade’s sleep was troubled and her nightmare about Mama was even more distorted. Not only was Marcia there pointing at her as she crouched beside Mama’s body, but this time Marcia accused her. ‘It’s your fault, little liar!’” (Naidoo, *Truth* 210). In doing what she believes she must to survive, Sade contravenes her moral code, compounding her sense of survivor’s guilt. Just as for Femi in the finger-printing episode, this moral disruption undermines her sense of self, compounding the rupture in her identity caused by her displacement as an asylum seeker. Herein lies the paradox of silence in the novel, in which the condition of refugeehood places the physical safety and the psychological health of the child at odds.

Speech and Social Justice

If Sade’s first exercise of agency is silence, ensuring her survival but compromising her psychological wellbeing, her second is to speak. Transitioning from a passive role in her own story to an active one – or rather an activist one – Sade and Femi visit “Mr Seven O’clock News” in an attempt to get their father’s story on television:

Sade found the thread she needed. She began with Papa, locked up in Heathlands Detention Centre. Papa who believed so strongly in telling the truth that his articles made the Brass Button generals in

their home country very angry. So angry that gunmen had tried to kill him and killed Mama instead. [...] Slowly she unravelled the tale. (Naidoo, *Truth* 259-60)

This language of weaving and unravelling shows the constructed nature of her testimony, which she has ownership of, rather than being visited upon her as her nightmares are. It is partly this exercise of agency that marks the beginning of her healing from trauma, which thus far has rendered her passive and objectified.

However, in light of the psychosocial root of Sade's trauma in her sense of alienation as a refugee, it is crucial that her healing is also socially situated. In breaking her silence she has not only begun this process of healing but has also instigated social change by publicising her family's story. Moreover, this moment demonstrates that a change in social conditions is the only means by which psychosocial trauma can be overcome. It is not the fact of Sade's speech in itself that ameliorates her trauma. As already noted, the fact that Femi's speech in the asylum screening unit does nothing to improve their situation compounds his dissociative trauma. It is in the resulting social change that this trauma can be overcome.

Conclusion

The Other Side of Truth not only positions trauma as continuous and socially contingent, but frames asylum seeker children as potential instigators of social action. This symbiosis of protest and healing from trauma foregrounds the agency of child asylum seekers, whilst not diminishing the abuse and objectification that they often experience. Naidoo places her young asylum seeker characters in the public sphere, as speaking subjects with a role in civic society, and positions her fiction in solidarity with the characters she depicts. The paradox of silence both as a survival mechanism and a source of further trauma demonstrates how displacement requires asylum seekers to prioritise their physical health over their psychological wellbeing. The objectification that Sade and Femi experience under the surveillance of the Nigerian state and the British immigration system only exacerbates this. In determining that their trauma has a psychosocial cause, *The Other Side of Truth* presents the healing of trauma as a corresponding social act. Ultimately, Naidoo's novel is not simply a narrative of trauma, but a narrative of activism, in which speech has the capacity to be both costly and healing in the work of social justice, and the site of healing from trauma also is the site of political awakening.

Biographical information: Helen King holds a Northern Bridge Collaborative Doctoral Award with Newcastle University and Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books. Her doctoral project is an investigation of the representations of displaced children in the fiction and archive of children's author Beverley Naidoo, and which informs the development of public engagement work with Seven Stories using the Naidoo collection.

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Notes

1 Papa was called "Baba" at this early stage of drafting.