

***Power Resistance and Liberation in Therapy with Survivors of Trauma: To Have our Hearts Broken***  
**Taiwo Afuape (2011)**

A review by Maria Castro

Book reviews seem to me to often be presented as 'objective' opinions, I find them depersonalised and somewhat abstract, both from the perspective of the writer and the reader; in that the writer rarely owns its position and instead adopts an omniscient tone toward a disembodied audience. This way of writing is not only incongruent with my own praxis but with every page of ***Power Resistance and Liberation in Therapy with Survivors of Trauma: To Have our Hearts Broken***. For in this book, **Taiwo Afuape** brings herself forth so, with such integrity, commitment, reflexivity and transparency, that she invites a profound personal engagement with her and her text. Taiwo Afuape turns her critical gaze to that which she is most passionate about, and she does this with great thoroughness and balance: a historical, current and future vision.

Writing a review of this book made me very happy and at the same time it was a challenge, not just because on reading it I felt I needed to find a different format than usual to locate my comments, but because I know and value Taiwo Afuape personally and professionally; after some thought, I decided that I would be writing this review as if I was writing back to the author. Taiwo, I would like to honour your gift by following 'outsider witness practices' in my review. In doing so, I am held accountable for my words and I am offering each reader a more explicitly relational and contextual viewpoint, as you do in your book.

There is so much in your book that resonates for me that it has been very hard to select out a few precise words –so this remains a review and does not become an essay on your book! I really agree with the critique on the effectiveness of any kind of counselling or therapy when “it focuses on the individual at the exclusion of acting on social structures and systems” (page 11). Your tuning into the fact that “resistance in therapy can lead to creative options for collaborative and empowering practice [...]. Rather than a reason to pathologise the client, this is an opportunity to talk with them about what would be more helpful and what resources they are drawing on to resist that which is not helpful” (page 40), really speaks to me because traditionally, 'resistance' in therapy, and generally in mental health, is seen in partial, mostly negative ways but you amplify the meaning of resistance to include a standing up for one's values and open up different ways of engaging with this.

In addition to the concept of 'resistance', I value your scrutiny of 'power' 'oppression', 'privilege', 'empowerment', 'justice', 'ethics', 'responsibility' and 'liberation', because you do this not just conceptually but in relation to practice (which is ongoing throughout the book) and because they are too often neglected by 'psy' professionals. I really like the naming of dominant Western views as what they are, 'minority' views, which reveals the workings of modern forms of colonisation and oppression. Towards the end of the book, one has gone on powerful journey with you but instead of this coming to an end, to a conclusion or a closing, the “question of what is therapeutic, and most likely to lead to liberation, should remain open and indeterminate” (page 189), so not only our journeys are not predetermined, they are ongoing.

However, the words that stood out for me the most, and kept coming back to me as I read through your book, were in the title: “To Have Our Hearts Broken”. This words initially conjured up for me an image of

damage, of a heart in pieces, of a legacy of pain endured, of hurt that left an everlasting mark, of a story of the past with total permanence that did not help the present nor the future. I did not like this strong image, I did not like it for survivors of trauma, nor for those who work with survivors of trauma; I did not like to have an image of your heart as broken either! Then something happened as I read on, this image changed to that of a big heart, it was not really 'broken', it may have been 'broken into' (or 'broken out of'), it was a heart 'on the line', it was pounding fiercely and yet warmly, non-threatening, full of pain but also all the richness of the many human emotions. This heart was very alive and open, all-embracing and loving.

"To Have Our Hearts Broken" particularly resonated for me because of my experience of pain, from my own life and the lives of others close to me, including the people I have worked with therapeutically. They spoke to me because of my experiencing and witnessing the transformation of suffering, of something that may have seemed permanent and completely overpowering, to preferred ways of living, including hope and rejoicing, through life and the therapeutic encounter. They spoke to me of commitment and connectedness, of engaging fully with others and life, of seeing the suffering of others as our own suffering and, equally, the joy of others as our own joy. It resonated with me because I stand by living with our hearts fully engaged.

So I started with an immobilizing sense of what it would be "To Have Our Hearts Broken" and was moved to what was implicit in that, to the fuller story of what it may be to have our hearts broken... and healed. I found myself learning things new, for example, the insights from W.E.B. Du Bois or the link of liberation with the Coordinated Management of Meaning. I also found myself reflecting on aspects I had already engaged in, such as the connection of narrative practice with liberation, in a different way. Finally, I felt this book is equally for those just initiating, already commenced or veterans in the walk of liberation; for those who feel the struggle of isolation in the context of oppressive mental health system and wider cultural practices and for those who are involved in community and social action. The feeling of deep resonance with your words, and their reach to those who are interested in reflecting on power, resistance, liberating therapeutic praxis, or particularly working with survivors of trauma, reminded me that we are a collective and it gave me hope that critics, objectors and those who are unsure or ambivalent about their position, would also be open to being moved, challenged or provoked, so that a more just society can be.