

Gabrielle Goliath

ELEGY

Kagiso Maema

„A tribute to the late Kagiso Maema

Let me first and foremost personally commemorate my Queen Kagiso Isamael Maema. She was beautiful, smart, and had a brilliant brain. She was a very proactive person when it came to listening, which is a sensitive art and skill. When Kagiso entered a room, society felt her presence; she was a drama Queen, a dancer and an entertainer. Kagiso admired everything and everybody, and was a very special part of the Maema family – she was active in cleaning at home, and liked going out with friends.

She was studying information technology, and was always happy to assist community members with their technological needs: radio, TV, cell phones, and all the rest. She was friendly, committed and self-confident. She didn't care about whether people called her by derogatory names, she was so proud about the way she was. What was beautiful to her was having fun with her friends, with good music, dancing and singing.

She was a star, and her life was a gentle melody.

My Queen Kagiso Maema, you were the most intelligent and important person in my life.

You have gone too soon, but I still remember you with good things. You may have done bad things in your life, but you were good to me as a daughter. You put a smile on my face, and you were like a flower growing in a secret place, and the sunshine of my life.

Kagiso Maema, I will never forget you my child.

Now I, and society, must struggle alone with our technology.

May your precious soul rest in peace.
We always remember you.“

Mrs Wilhelmina Maema, March 2019

Initiated in 2015, *Elegy* is a long-term commemorative performance project. Staged in various locations and contexts, each performance calls together a group of female vocal performers who collectively enact a ritual of mourning. Durational and physically taxing, the performance sustains a kind of sung cry – evoking the presence of an absent individual.

Responding to the physical, ontological and structural outworkings of rape-culture in South Africa, *Elegy* performances recall the identity of individuals whose subjectivities have been fundamentally violated – and who are, as such, all too easily consigned to a generic, all-encompassing victimhood. With each performance commemorating a specific woman or LGBTQI+ individual subjected to fatal acts of gendered and sexualised violence, significant to the work is how loss becomes a site for community, and for empathic, cross-cultural and cross-national encounters. Seeking to work around the kinds of symbolic violence through which traumatised black and brown bodies are routinely objectified, *Elegy* performances open an alternative intersectional space, wherein mourning is presented as a social and politically productive work – not in the sense of healing or ‘closure’, but as a necessary and sustained irresolution.

Kagiso Maema’s violated body was found on January 6th 2018, dumped in a field in Rustenberg (South Africa), not far from the tavern where she had last been seen alive.

As a Transgender woman, Kagiso’s murder appeared to be one of a spate of hate crimes directed towards members of the LGBTQI+ community. Kagiso’s half-naked body bore evidence of strangulation, as well as wounds to the head and arms. Police were able to identify her body by a tattoo which read “Bitch Makhoya”. An investigation has been ongoing since, but no arrests have been made.

#WhoKilledKagisoMaema?, a documentary and initiative spearheaded by Iranti, a media advocacy organisation that defends the rights of Lesbians, Transgender and Intersex persons in Africa, continue to support Kagiso’s mother, Wilhelmina Maema, in her search for justice.

My special thanks and gratitude to Iranti for their extraordinary work, and invaluable assistance, as well as Mrs Wilhelmina Maema, for her open and generous spirit.