

# What does silence sound like?

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Imagine silence. At the very suggestion you might have closed your eyes and thought of a place, perhaps high up in the mountains, where the light is mellow, dappled, suggestive of peace.

Imagine a more sinister kind of silence. A silence that doesn't lull but maul. A silence that historically, within its clenched fists, retains the sinister memories of innumerable sexual violations. Also, imagine myriad forms of discriminations and

*Yes, we live in difficult times, difficult more for men, whose stranglehold is under threat. It is also exciting times because, after a prolonged silence, women are speaking up.*

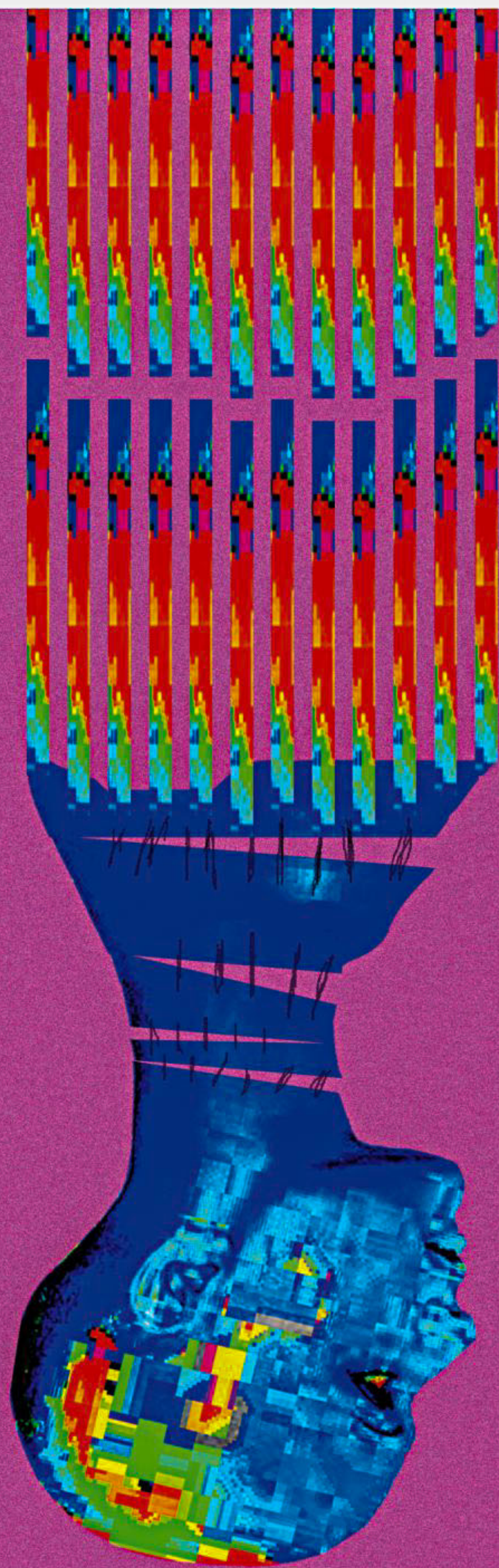


ILLUSTRATION: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

disenfranchisements that quelled, quashed, and subjugated women. Imagine the countless women who must have tried to speak out, but couldn't. Imagine...

*Hush*, they were told by everyone around them. *Calm down, forget it, shut up*. Imagine the terrifying grip of this mafia-like omertà—the mafia of men, patriarch...patriarchy. Imagine the havoc it wreaked inside the minds and bodies of generations of women, for millennia now.

One day, not in the distant past, we heard a lone voice of a woman stand up to a man for work-place sexual harassment. The moment she did so, the world around her went dark. She found herself impaled by a solitary light that fell from the authority above. Around the beam of light sat, in shapes of men, in their dark suits, their engorged heads bobbing, their necks craning, their foreheads crinkled, their eyes glowing, their masticated boluses of antagonism waiting to be spat out, to tear apart the woman who had dared speak against one of their kind. They shamed her, mocked her, called her demented and unstable, and accused her of erotomania. The so-called due process of men in power was an elaborate ruse to put women in their place. Under their libertarian and conservative masks they were that monolithic authority, and yes, despite Jordan Peterson's infantile rants, patriarchy *is* socially constructed. A triumphalist like Peterson "conceal from themselves the bourgeois-limited content of their struggles." The empirical universalist view they claim to represent is actually a very factionalist viewpoint.

That lone brave voice I was alluding to belonged to Anita F. Hill, a professor at the University of Oklahoma's law school then. Her boss was... a man.

With the advent of social media, for the first-time, women had recourse to get their stories out without it being

mediated by institutions of men. #MeToo went viral after actress Alyssa Milano, in the wake of the allegations against Harvey Weinstein, on October 16, 2017 tweeted: "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." The creator of the "me too" movement, Tarana Burke, had meant it to be about "empowerment through empathy."

The Kavanaugh case was déjà vu. Doreen St. Félix, reporting on the Kavanaugh hearings, writes in the *New Yorker*, "...it should be as plain as day that what we witnessed was the patriarchy testing how far its politics of resentment can go. And there is no limit."

Be it Junot Díaz or M.J. Akbar, the institutions of power, the institutions of authority of men, have made sure that 'one of us' shan't fall. Akbar's recourse was to slap a case and parade out an army of highly paid lawyers. The institutions that Díaz was connected with, and exonerated him, have an intricate incestuous web of interconnections. Also, hiding behind their own traumas, or the 'systemic', only confirms the argument. Like Kevin Spacey who said he was sorry for his "deeply inappropriate drunken behaviour" before coming out as a gay man. Or Díaz, who elaborately and eloquently detailed his own abuse as a child. These can't be treated as extenuating circumstances. For if they were, then uncountable abused women (and other genders) would be perpetrators of violent behaviour, acting out of their traumas, as a rule. What do we do when the powerless become the predator? All the three men here were called out not by one but many for their misogyny and abusive behaviours.

These are powerful men, true, but *not* strong men. For fighting for social justices is as much fighting it in the personal realms.

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