

## THE APARTHEID ARCHIVE: MEMORY, VOICE AND NARRATIVE AS LIBERATORY PRACTICE

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### **Abstract.**

*This article explores the socio-political imperative and psychosocial value of re-engaging and expanding the apartheid archive in contemporary South Africa. It suggests that this archive's entanglement with de facto official histories of South Africa has resulted in certain elisions about the historical content of this archive, but also compromises our ability to examine the ongoing effects of our racialised past. It argues that the archive needs to be liberated from these socio-political constraints, expanded, re-appropriated and reclaimed, if we are to more fully apprehend and comprehend the impact of this history. Utilising the Apartheid Archive Project (AAP) as an exemplar, the article highlights the value of retrieving personal memories in countering the totalising effects of official histories, argues for the relationship between such memories and the articulation of voice for those marginalised groups and subalterns that have been excluded from official histories and the archive, and suggests that the narrative is a liminal mnemonic technique that allows for the expression of these memories as fragments and traces of the past that are re-constituted in the present, but also allows for a future imaginary. While recognising that memories articulated through narratives have limitations and are but one source of archival data, the article nevertheless argues that this is a critical political and psychological act in expanding the archive and has certain relationships to a liberatory praxis. In particular, it involves ongoing reflexive critique of this archive as a form of action and practice that transcends an event or moment, and is rather an evolving and dynamic process; allows for greater inclusivity; respects diversity; facilitates historical reclamation and democratisation; intersects with decolonisation methodologies and processes; and surfaces new modalities and interdisciplinary ways of knowing and understanding. The article concludes that all of these may allow for a range of alternative analyses, subject positions and social*

*relations to emerge that may help to extricate us from the fixity and binaried nature of blackness and whiteness that continue to plague us in post-apartheid South Africa.*

**Key words:** *Apartheid Archive Project (AAP), apartheid, archive, memory, voice narrative, liberation psychology, praxis, post-apartheid South Africa*

## **INTRODUCTION.**

Sixteen years ago the world witnessed the official demise of *apartheid*, one of the most inhumane and most widely condemned forms of institutionalised racism. It was also 16 years ago that a widespread orgy of violence and social mayhem in South Africa, reportedly orchestrated to sabotage efforts to end apartheid, came to a reluctant end (Beresford, 2010; Harris, 2010).

In reflecting on this watershed historical moment, it is important to note that many South Africans today have life experiences that straddle this divide. Close to 60% of South Africa's current population lived for a significant period of their childhood or adulthood through the horrors of the apartheid reality (Statistics South Africa, 2010). Of note too, as Harris (2010) points out, a third of the white voters in the 1992 Whites-Only referendum called by the then ruling National Party supported the maintenance of the apartheid status quo, while the remaining two-thirds did not vote for the abolition of apartheid, but rather for a continuation of the negotiation process. Indeed, a significant number of white South Africans alongside various Bantustan leaders and functionaries were involved in various acts of violence aimed at perpetuating apartheid or at least the rewards apartheid afforded them. These rear-guardist acts of violence included the *invasion* of Bophutatswana by right-wingers, the assassination of Chris Hani, and the march on Shell House by armed Inkatha members (Harris, 2010).

Despite the recency of these events and the formal end of apartheid, there are many South Africans who today, when referring to the past, create the impression that the excesses of the apartheid order never really took place, that a significant proportion of the South African population was not complicit in these excesses, or indeed that the pernicious effects of this social formation were not as dire as they are currently made out to be. As an aside, Rösen (in Villa-Vicencio, 2004) noted similar processes of denial amongst large sections of the German public during the period immediately following the Holocaust.

### **Race and racism: recalcitrance and recrudescence.**

One of the key assumptions informing this article is that it is partly because of the consistent elision or denial of the racism of the past, that we have seen the re-emergence in recent years of some of the vilest expressions of racism, not at all unlike that which characterised the old order. For example, since 2004, South Africa has witnessed a series of fairly harrowing manifestations of racism; some of which must certainly revivify in those who had lived through the dark days of the apartheid era, memories that they would not want to relive. While certainly not as pervasive as during the apartheid era, disconcerting incidents such as the following, which have been reported with disquieting regularity in the media in recent years, cannot but serve as ineluctable reminders and *post facto* evidence and re-inscriptions of the perversions of the apartheid order.

On 09 February 2004, a white Limpopo farmer and three accomplices were arrested by local police after they had allegedly severely assaulted a worker, Nelson Shisane, and thrown him into a lion's enclosure. The four associates were reported to have stood by watching as the lion mauled Shisane and dragged him into the bush (Arenstein, 2004).

On 14 January 2008, an 18-year-old white youth went on a shooting rampage in an informal settlement, Skierlik, killing four black people, including a three-month-old baby. At the time, the police argued that the attack was racially motivated (Thakali, 2008).

A month later, on 15 February 2008, two white adolescent boys at a high school in Pretoria were stabbed following ongoing racial strife amongst learners at this school. The two white boys were hospitalised while three black boys were arrested in connection with the incident (Thakali, 2008).

In February 2008, the now notorious video made by four white students at the University of the Free State hit the headlines in South Africa and abroad. The video depicted five black workers being forced into a series of degrading activities, including ingesting food on which the students had allegedly urinated. The students had reportedly made the video in protest against the forced racial integration of the university's residences (Thakali, 2008).

A month later, at the same university, a black student was accosted by a group of white students who locked him up in a cupboard containing rotten potatoes for more than three hours after being told that he was not welcome in the historically white men's residence where he had been allocated accommodation (Joubert, 2008).

Many of the above events were of course publicly overshadowed by the *xenophobic* attacks that took place in May 2008. Here, broad based social discontent took on racialised proportions and in an unanticipated wave of violence that started in Alexandra township, identifiable black foreign nationals (and some black South Africans) were brutally and violently attacked, dispossessed and displaced (Hassim, Kupe & Worby, 2008).

Judging by the highly publicised incidents described above, racism and its manifestations, rather than having become progressively less pronounced since 1994 (as would have been expected, given the establishment and progressive maturation of post-1994 democratic structures and systems in South Africa), at points, appear to be disconcertingly recrudescing, recalcitrant, salient and overt in contemporary South Africa.

Of course, there are the much more quotidian and systemic realities that continue to remind us of the apartheid days and the designs of the apartheid order, but which do not grab the imagination of the media and the public's attention in quite the same manner as the more dramatically sensational events described above. These include the ongoing daily struggles of hundreds of thousands of impoverished black people still trying to access a life better than the one that they had, or would have been relegated to by the apartheid order. For example, May, Woolard and Klasen (2000) reported that six years after the dismantling of the apartheid order, the income of the average white household was five times higher than the average household income of black families. Furthermore, recent government statistics reveal that currently only 10 per cent of black

households fall within the top income bracket in South Africa, compared to 65 per cent of white households (Faul, 2008). Data released by Statistics South Africa (2008) reveal an unemployment rate of 30.7% amongst Africans, compared to 19.9% and 14.6% for Coloureds and Indians, respectively. The rate for Whites was 4.4% (Statistics South Africa, 2008). Furthermore, in 2000, Budlender reported that while the infant mortality rate for Whites was 7 per 100 000, it was 54 per 100 000 for Africans. The above continues to reflect the integral relationship between race and class, even though this dynamic relationship has shifted somewhat with the emergence of a larger black middle class and upper class in contemporary South Africa.

More recently, Villa-Vicencio (2008: 24) provided a rather poignant illustration of how the neglect of the racism of the apartheid order is currently perpetuating the ongoing sedimentation of the sequelae of apartheid, when he noted that a “recent visit to Vryburg [...] presented [him] with a picture of excessive opulence cheek by jowl with poverty and exclusion – divided largely along racial lines. Young white males swagger in the streets with holstered guns on display. Black learners are relegated to schools that barely function, in order to allow white learners to pursue the privileges their parents demand. The main high school [...] an ‘Afrikaans school’ [...] is essentially white, and an ‘an English school’ [...] is black”.

Given contemporary South Africa’s apparent self-imposed, and some would argue, carefully managed amnesia about the apartheid era (Villa-Vicencio, 2004; Peterson, in press), as well as its blindness to the ongoing impact of the institutionalised apartheid racism of the past on current inter-group and inter-personal relationships (as evidenced in part by the reports and statistics presented above), we believe that it is important to re-engage with this past, so as to deal with its effects on the present and future. As the film director, Ramadan Suleman (2009: 32) notes, “[s]ooner rather than later the complex issues that we hide, or are unwilling to resolve with honesty and integrity because of our human frailties and fears, will return in more violent and threatening ways. The most we can do is deal with them [...]. The future demands such commitment from all of us”.

What is apparent from the above is that South African society presents as a highly contradictory social space and context in which there are strong injunctions towards a collective social amnesia and an elision of the ongoing presence and impact of race and racism (Peterson, in press), but simultaneously, where there is a veritable explosion of racialised forms of relating. In a similar manner to which Fukuyama (1992) queried *the end of history* in the post-Cold War era and suggested the unabashed global victory of liberal democracy, some have also suggested that the demise of formal global bastions of racism such as apartheid have signalled the possibilities for a post-race world (see Gilroy, 2000 for a broader discussion of the post-race argument)<sup>1</sup>. However, others such as Ndlovu (2010) points out that in fact there is no fundamental end to race and racism in South Africa, and citing Hall (1996, in Ndlovu, 2010: 56), highlights “a ‘discursive explosion’, in the national, political and public imagination around ‘race’ and all its varieties in South Africa”. Earlier still, the social and political commentator, Neville Alexander (1992), had noted that the historical interpenetration of race and class would result in challenges to any deracialisation project, especially if class inequality was not fundamentally addressed in South Africa. More recently within

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<sup>1</sup> We are grateful to Brett Bowman for this analogy.

psychology, Stevens, Franchi and Swart (2006) raised the question as to whether deracialisation was indeed possible within contemporary South Africa, and essentially argue that at present there are significant *conditions of impossibility* that fundamentally constrain such processes – most notably the range of interwoven social asymmetries that referentially co-exist alongside race.

### **History and the archive: revisions, elisions and conflations.**

Clearly our position in this article is that *race matters* and that this history must be engaged with if we are to understand its continued resonance in the present and its potential role in the future. Admittedly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has already made a critical contribution to this process of dealing with the past (Cassin, Cayla & Salazar, 2004; Villa-Vicencio, 2004). However, given its tendency to focus on the more dramatic or salient narratives of apartheid's gross human rights violations and atrocities, it effectively (albeit unintentionally) foreclosed the possibility of a fuller exploration of the more quotidian, and no less significant, manifestations of apartheid abuse. As a consequence, much of these common, everyday details of apartheid racism had not been meaningfully assessed or publicly acknowledged (Peterson, in press). It is largely for this reason that the Apartheid Archive Research Project was initiated. However, it is important to note that the TRC played a significant role in augmenting the official record; one that had been systematically sanitised and deliberately destroyed in some instances, between 1990 and 1994 in particular, in an attempt to conceal the machinations of the apartheid State prior to the transition to a non-racial democracy and a change in government (Harris, 2002; Beresford, 2010).

However, beyond extending and elaborating the apartheid archive, in terms of both nature and size, the TRC was also a public national process which – advertently and inadvertently – implicated itself in complex practices of memorialisation and history-making. Harris (2002) notes that the totality of social experiences and memories within a given society can never be fully captured in the archive, and that in turn, *official* histories are only partial representations of these archives. In the context of the TRC and associated memorialising and history-making endeavours, a central function was not only the recovery of lost accounts that had been occluded from the apartheid archive, but also the construction of a national collective memory aimed at facilitating the nation-building imperatives facing South African society (Posel 1999; Bundy, 2000; van der Walt, Franchi & Stevens, 2003). To this end, certain elements regarded as being more or less central to the archival record, were consequently either included or excluded. In the Derridean (1998) sense, this reflects the fact that the archive is both a place of *commencement* and *order*, that is, the archive provides a record and simultaneously determines what it is that is to be included in such a record. The archivists/archons/researchers are central in this process of defining exactly what information is to be included or muted. Treanor (2009: 289-290) notes that “the nature of the ‘archive’ affects not only what is archived, but also how we relate to and access it. The archive also conditions the process of archiving itself and, indeed, the very nature of what is archivable. The archive is thus a filter of sorts that is turned toward both the past (because it filters how the tradition is transmitted to us) and the future (because it filters what we archive and what is archivable, and thus filters what we transmit to the future). If this is the case, however, an alteration of the archive (qua archon) will cause an alteration in our understanding of the archive (qua arche) and, moreover, will alter what is archivable (i.e. what is ‘fit’ to be archived). That is, any

alteration of the archive will alter both our understanding of the past and our relationship to the future”.

From the above, it is apparent that there may sometimes be a relatively seamless transition from an extended archive, to a collective memory, to some degree of *official* history, which of course involves the manipulation of the archive itself in certain revisionist ways. This speaks directly to the socio-political processes surrounding any archive that come to privilege, include and exclude certain ways of knowing and therefore ways of being in the world, and while the archive is always larger than any *official* history, it is always perspectival, oblique and partial and therefore forces us to position ourselves politically in relation to it. Historical revisionism is always associated with certain elisions in the archive, and because *official* histories tend to be more publicly available and overtly ideologically loaded, there is sometimes a slippage between what we understand to be the archive as opposed to *official* histories, that is, a conflation of the two that requires some unpacking, disentanglement and *liberation* which may offer up different ways of not only creating histories, but also of understanding the impact of these histories on our present and future.

### **The *liberation* of the archive: possibilities and impossibilities.**

What is perhaps important at the point is to clarify exactly how it is that we attribute meaning to the phrase, *the liberation of the archive*, in this article. In qualifying our usage of the phrase, what should be apparent from the above is that we in no way conceive of the archive as an entity or record that is neutral, objective and reflective of an absolute truth. Rather, we accept Derrida's (1998) broad conception of the archive, in so far as we believe that the meanings that we find in the archive are never completely transparent, unambiguous and value-free, and that “[a]n archive is rarely, if ever, black or white, true or false” (Treanor, 2009: 291). Instead, an archive, and especially the apartheid archive, is fundamentally related to relations of power in deeply personal, psychosocial and socio-political ways, as the archive regulates the nature of information, the formats of information, the access to information, and the nature and hierarchies of information and knowledge in any given society.

So what is meant by *the liberation of the archive*? Fundamentally, we believe that the constraints imposed on the archive should be challenged at any given point in time – through pushing the boundaries of the creation, maintenance and utilisation of the archive. Of course, such a task cannot be claimed as the domain of any single individual or group, nor can it be limited to a specific moment or event, but is potentially a collective process that requires hyper-reflexivity and an openness to critique. More specifically the phrase, *the liberation of archive* is used in three broad senses. The first relates to the possibility when working with the archive to cast a different socio-political light onto the archive, so that what is sometimes concealed in shadows becomes illuminated. In other words, casting a different socio-political light onto the archive opens up possibilities for extricating it from its current socio-political foreclosure, for understanding its contents, and for re-thinking these contents historically, in the present, and imagining their impacts on the future.

The second usage of the phrase, *the liberation of the archive*, is related to the understanding of liberation as an active process that implies wrestling a social resource from the grasp of those who control it, through expanding the boundaries of who may contribute to the creation of an archive, and who can have access to it. This process is

essentially concerned with elements of inclusion, democratisation, appropriation and reclamation of the archive. Interestingly, the etymological root of the word *liberation* suggests something that *belongs to the people*, and rather than simply setting it free, is also fundamentally concerned with *returning it to the people*.<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly and finally, given the potential of those working with the archive to re-inscribe a different set of relations of power onto the archive, there is a need to encourage reflexive liberatory praxis within academics' work in and on the archive, so as to avoid as far as possible the usurping of the voices of others, that bell hooks (1990) refers to in her critique of academic pursuits of this nature. This is a point to which we return later in the article.

Of course, a commitment to a theoretical and ethical engagement with the apartheid archive that is rooted in a praxis that is politically progressive and speaks to processes of decolonisation and anti-oppression in the context of post-apartheid South Africa underlies all three usages of *the liberation of the archive*.

### **Political imperatives, psychological features: the apartheid archive project.**

Given the above, the Apartheid Archive Project is premised on a broad set of political imperatives and psychosocial processes, and while these do not imply an internally homogeneous set of standpoints or perspectives that are held by the entire project team, they do provide the basis for collaboration on the project.

Firstly, the project is explicitly based on the assumption that past experiences (and particularly past traumatogenic experiences) will ineluctably re-inscribe themselves in the present if they are not acknowledged and dealt with. Stated differently, the project argues for the importance of fully comprehending and re-engaging the past if we are to understand the present and imagine the possibilities of the future. Such an understanding opens up conditions of possibility not only for analysing and understanding the past and its resonance in the present, but also creates spaces for an imaginary in which we can construct new individual and collective identities, subjectivities and positionalities that may offer up alternatives to the highly binaried and racialised social relations that continue to characterise contemporary South African society.

Secondly, because the intention of the Apartheid Archive Project is to allow ordinary South Africans to tell and make public their stories, it is hoped that the archive will serve to counter the tendency that has come to characterise the post-1994 period of silencing people and their claims about, and versions of, their past. Thus, the project aims to examine the nature of the experiences of racism of (particularly "ordinary") South Africans under the old apartheid order and their continuing effects on individual and group functioning in contemporary South Africa. More specifically, the project aims to explore how earlier experiences under the old apartheid order continue to mediate individual and group responses to the *Self* and *Other* currently. To this end, the project had set itself the objective of collecting narratives of experiences of racism during the apartheid period; narratives of both black and white South Africans, of elites and marginalised social categories, of racist perpetration and victimisation, and of trauma and resilience. The intention is to ultimately collect approximately 5000 narratives over a five-year period from different sectors of South African society, but particularly from

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<sup>2</sup> We are grateful to Leswin Laubscher for this insight.

marginalised groups, such as the poor and the politically, socially and economically marginalised, whose life stories are rarely incorporated into dominant historical accounts of the past and who rarely are afforded the opportunity to publicly or personally reflect on their past experiences.

Parallel to these basic political imperatives, but as critically important to the project, are a number of psychological features that are central to such recovery, retrieval and re-telling processes. It is hoped that the Apartheid Archive Project will provide a non-silencing and non-deflecting *containing space* in which oppressive, dehumanising and painful past experiences can be re-appropriated in non-persecutory and very importantly, in transformative ways (see Casement, 1995). Here, the use of Bion's notion of *containment* (see Ivey, 2009) is intentional. When the Apartheid Archive Project was conceptualised, the intention was to create not simply a space in which memories of the past could be inscribed, but also a space which could absorb and re-process accounts of past intolerable experiences, so as to ultimately afford individuals the internal capacity to accommodate or own these experiences and the knowledge and feelings which accompany these.

Furthermore, it is also hoped that the archive can serve as a *potential space* (Winnicott, 1971), a space that is located *between*, and contains, both the outside and the subjective, the past and the future; and very importantly, a space where all *enunciabilities* (see Stoler, 2002: 87) are possible – in other words, a space in which people can creatively (and without reproach) engage with the subjective, the past, the present, the future, and relations with the *Self* and the *Other* (see Winnicott, 1971). Indeed, it is largely based on the importance that we attach to creative processes in (re)engaging with the past that we had decided to focus on narratives rather than the typical artefacts usually associated with archives when we conceptualised the Apartheid Archive Project. Like Polkinghorne (1995: 7) we believe that narratives constitute one of the more accessible symbolic forms through which “human experience as lived can be [creatively] expressed”.

The following section of the article addresses certain specificities related to how the apartheid archive is being augmented, as a core objective, within the Apartheid Archive Project.

### **RE-ENGAGING AND EXPANDING THE APARTHEID ARCHIVE.**

One of the primary means of expanding the apartheid archive within this project has been to solicit narratives from ordinary South Africans across the social spectrum, drawing on their earliest and/or most significant experiences of racism under the apartheid order. This has thus far been accomplished through three primary mechanisms, namely, direct solicitation via a research team member, direct solicitation followed by interviews conducted by graduate students who are completing research within the Apartheid Archive Project, and through a general internet portal invitation that is accessible to the public (see [www.apartheidarchive.org](http://www.apartheidarchive.org)).

Central to this process of augmenting the archive is the relationship between personal memories, voice and narratives. While recognising that other forms of archival material or data are important in the development of such an archive, the project has focused specifically on the importance of personal memories in countering the totalising effects of *official* histories. In particular, it has understood personal memories as integral to

generating *voice* by previously marginalised and occluded groups and allowing for subalterns to speak, and views the narrative form of conveying these memories as a liminal mnemonic technique, device and expressive vehicle. While this section of the article essentially focuses on the form of archival expansion, targeting memory and narrative in particular, the implied liberatory praxis associated with *voicing* (often referred to in the areas of decolonising methodologies and liberation psychology) (see for example, Bulhan, 1985; Martín Baro, 1994; Smith 1999), which underpins both of these issues of form, is reflected upon briefly in this section as well.

### **Personal memories as new archival material.**

Within the Apartheid Archive Project, the primary source of data from which analyses are presently being conducted is in the form of the personal memories of participants who have elected to submit their narratives. Indeed, the invitation to participate speaks directly to this form of data when potential participants are requested to submit “stories of their earliest and/or most significant experiences of race and racism in apartheid South Africa” (see [www.apartheidarchive.org](http://www.apartheidarchive.org)).

While a great deal has been written about the limitations of memory (see for example, the article by Eagle & Bowman in this Special Issue), its reliability and its accuracy as a record of past events, and the importance of analytic caution when utilising memory as a data source because of the nature of false memories, reconstituted memories, conflated memories, and so forth, memory or memory traces and fragments remain powerful sources of information and also have several critical merits.

While personal memories may not be reflective of *truth* in any absolute sense, Harris (2002) points out that in cases such as South Africa where parts of the archival record have been sanitised or even obliterated, personal memories provide a significant tool for the augmentation of this destroyed record. In other words, personal memories are at times the only form of data that can be accessed, as all other forms of records that could potentially be installed into an archive have been systematically erased. These kinds of erasures are also present in many other colonial and post-colonial contexts in which practices akin to “*cultural genocide*” (Kuper, 1994) have resulted in the suppression and elimination of indigenous cultural practices, heritages and histories for political reasons, further obliging us to seriously consider Petersen’s (2002: 30) assertion that we should “occupy ourselves with locating, understanding and foregrounding the various forms of oppositional experiences and knowledge systems that are currently omitted from the archives in their present figuration”.

Personal memories also provide an opportunity to challenge the totalising effects of official histories and many of the grand narratives that accompany them. Nieftagodien (cited in Sullivan and Stevens, 2010: 426) notes that “personal accounts (for example, in the oral history tradition), can become an important space in which to undermine ‘grand’ narratives that seem to cohere histories in neat, linear and inevitably predictable ways [...]. The foregrounding of personal accounts at various points within [...] narratives therefore [provide] points of rupture, of discontinuity, and of possibility in expanding histories to be more inclusive of multiple voices”. Personal memories must therefore at times be privileged as their functions are not only related to historical expansion and inclusivity, but also to providing alternative readings of histories themselves.

Hamilton (2002), in her reflections on the place of oral histories (and by extension, forms of personal and collective memory) in the politics of archiving, also points to the fact that oral histories and their very fluidity are what give this form of data its strength. Not only do oral histories allow for a perspective that encourages us to think about history as that which can also be written by those on the outside of the academy, but they also recognise the resilience of certain collective knowledges that are held personally and communally.

Finally, within psychology there is also a plethora of writing and research on the relationship between memory, trauma, testimony, memorialisation, healing and reconciliation. Here for example, Caruth's (1995) work on the relationship between trauma and memory focuses not only on the manner in which trauma impacts on memory and how the two are reciprocally intertwined, but also on the flexibility and limitations of traumatic memories. Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) has also spoken specifically about the re-enactment of historical traumas and the memories of these traumas through forms of violence in the present; thereby strengthening the argument that memory is the conduit between past and present with regard to traumatic experiences. Gobodo-Madikizela and Van Der Merwe (2009) and Hamber and Palmry (2009) have also more recently argued for the centrality of memory in processes of testimony, memorialisation, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation, especially in post-conflict and post-authoritarian societies that have had as their bedrock, forms of social asymmetries, marginalisation and oppression.

From the above, it is apparent that our view is that memory as a data source is not only a legitimate one, but may also be essential to certain socio-political, psychosocial and psychological reconstruction processes involving the archive.

### **Narrative as liminal mnemonic technique, device and expressive vehicle.**

If personal memories are to be understood as a form of *raw data* in the Apartheid Archive Project at present, then the narrative form can be understood as the mnemonic technique, device or vehicle that assists in eliciting, crafting and conveying these memories to an apprehending audience of interlocutors. As such, narratives and the analysis of their form and content have thus far been a central feature of the project (see [www.apartheidarchive.org](http://www.apartheidarchive.org)), being at once, both "the object of research or a means for the study of another question" (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998: 2).

However, as an expressive vehicle, the narrative is much more than a technique or device, but is rather central to meaning production and signification. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006: 198) state that it is our individual narratives that give meaning to and construct our lives. They add that because we live our lives within social and historical contexts, they are "intertwined with organisational, social, and historical narratives". Similarly, Jones (1996) notes that we should not think of the narrative as *a story* or *the story*, as narratives never have a single meaning for participants of their interlocutors.

Narratives are therefore never pure reflections of deeds, behaviours and events. They are always sites in which the personal investments of speakers, listeners, the invisible interlocutors who may apprehend such stories, and the influence of the social context on our interpretations of the world converge to give rise to a constructed version of the event (Sand, 2004). Along similar lines, Chase (1995: 22) notes that "we serve our theoretical interpretation in general social processes when we take seriously the idea

that people make sense of life experiences by narrating them". Foucault (1975: 204) argues that narratives therefore allow for speakers and their actions to be elevated from "the familiar to the remarkable, the everyday to the historical". In this manner, the Apartheid Archive Project aims to insert the experiences of ordinary South Africans in the written history of South Africa.

Ross (2000: 41) further states that "among the most characteristic approaches in the Critical Race Theory genre are storytelling, counter-storytelling, and analysis of narrative". In addition to the fact that black history (and its ability to recall its racist colonial beginnings outside of the colonisers' meticulously white-washed records) has been passed on through the art of storytelling, narrative accounts have also been found to be powerful in that they allow the protagonists the agency to tell their story in their own words. In the context of reflecting on racism, the value of this agency cannot be overstated. People are not only storytellers by nature, but stories also give coherence and continuity to experience and communication (Lieblich et al, 1998). The use of the narrative epistemology, according to Hatch and Cunliffe (2006), suggests that humans develop knowledge by listening and telling stories to each other and to themselves. We can therefore learn about the social constructedness of historical experiences, social knowledges, subjectivities and identities, by studying social subjects' stories and their accounts of their experiences.

Here, the narrative also reflects a certain liminality that opens up specific analytic possibilities. In particular, this liminality (Turner, 2008) refers to the narrative's ability to straddle elements of the past, the present and the future – an in-between space or "*threshold*" between the past that is known and a future that is yet to emerge. The narrative is a vehicle that allows for memories from the past to be coherently articulated through the analytic lens of the present, but also to offer a range of possibilities of a future imaginary that may run against the grain of both the past and present.

Important to note here is that when we conceptualised the project, we accepted that the narratives submitted to the archive would not necessarily provide *accurate* or *objective* accounts of the past. This, of course, does not present any significant problem because, like Elliott (2005: 39), we believe that the ultimate value of narratives resides less in truth-claims than in "their reflections of the interpretations, values, positions, [experiences] and so forth of the narrators". These reflections, it is hoped, would offer us an array of alternative entry points into the past and an understanding of the present.

Furthermore, we developed the project with the understanding that it would constitute an open process, one that would remain active as long as there is a need for it. In other words, the process does not constitute the "end to the past" (cf. Petersen, in press). Indeed, each narrative that will be captured in the archive may be seen to constitute another beginning to engaging with the past, the present and the future, thereby capitalising on the liminal nature of narratives as a form of expression (see Turner, 2008).

Finally, while acknowledging that narratives (particularly socially and politically dominant narratives) are often used to defend and maintain the status quo, we also believe that they have important emancipatory or liberatory potential, through allowing individuals the space and means to re-appropriate particularly difficult aspects of their

lives, in a manner that is psychologically and socially transformative or generative (Plummer, in Elliott, 2005). This is consistent with Rappaport's (1995) suggestion that storytelling and narratives have transformative power in building communities, and Williams, Labonte and O'Brien's (2003: 36) argument that narratives as a form of "storytelling within group and community development work allows people to reveal and strengthen new communal narratives that challenge dominant narratives, and to (re)construct communities as empowered rather than disempowered collectives". Williams et al go on to argue that "[a]t a structural level of change, storytelling has the potential to uncover knowledge that has been subjugated to dominant ideas, particularly when groups at the economic or cultural margins engage in a shared process of storytelling" (2003: 36).

### **The subaltern voice.**

Central to the Apartheid Archive Project is the epistemic assumption that it is fundamentally related to the inclusion of the marginalised, but several writers have queried whether the premise of creating opportunities for subalterns to articulate voice is indeed a viable one. Most notably, Spivak (1988), in her essay entitled, *Can the subaltern speak?*, critically argues that there are significant dangers in re-inscribing the marginalised position of subalterns when they are assumed to be homogeneous collectives. Vahabzadeh (2008) also cautions that the voices of subalterns can quite insidiously and rapidly become ideologically appropriated and hegemonically "re-grounded", thereby resulting in more complex and insidious ways of subordinating those who are already subordinated. hooks (1990) also highlights how the voices of subalterns are often appropriated by academics, who then usurp their authorial power and relegate them to the margins once more.

While these are obviously critiques that we are ever mindful of and hyper-reflexive about within the project, we hold a position that more closely resembles Bhabha's (1996) agentic view of the subaltern. He argues that subalterns have the ability to challenge and subvert those who are dominant within social relations of power and who occupy positions of hegemony, and that agentic subalterns may engage in counter-hegemonic practices and resistance struggles to contest their social exclusion and marginalisation as part of an organic liberatory praxis.

As a consequence, we are interested in creating the context for not only ordinary accounts to be included in the expanded apartheid archive, but also for subaltern voices to find the space for articulation in ways that counter their absence and silence in this archive at present – that effectively allow them to challenge and destabilise the centre from the periphery.

### **EXPANDING THE APARTHEID ARCHIVE AS LIBERATORY PRACTICE.**

In this final section of the article, we explore in a more focused manner how expanding the apartheid archive draws on theoretical work conducted in critical psychology, liberation psychology, community psychology and critical theory, as well as on decolonising methodologies, in order to give rise to specific potentialities related to a liberatory praxis itself.

More specifically, we are interested in the underpinning processes related to this archival expansion that speak to the potential for countering the historical effects of uneven social relations that have arisen in contexts of oppression and domination, and

thereby challenge resultant social asymmetries that continue to vex us in our present local contexts and similar international contexts.

For Smith (1999: 39), the transformative work in this kind of liberatory praxis “means struggling to make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful. Part of the exercise is about recovering our own stories of the past. This is inextricably bound to a recovery of our language and epistemological foundations. It is also about reconciling and reprioritising what is really important about the past with what is important about the present”.

Of course, we are deeply cognisant of the fact that the archive is never static, but always dynamically in motion; that new developments and expansions in the archive from within our project will also include and exclude certain information and privilege certain groups’ experiences and specific knowledges; that there is therefore a need for internal critique and hyper-reflexivity; that any liberatory potential within archival work has to be conceived of as an ongoing process itself, as opposed to a specific temporal action; and that despite the limitations of facilitating *the liberation of the archive*, we avoid political and psychological paralysis and continue to challenge old and new hegemonies that are reflected in and reproduced through this archive.

Below, we selectively highlight four key elements within the Apartheid Archive Project that intrinsically reflect this potential liberatory praxis, namely, decolonisation and the reclamation of history; forging collective memories and alternate subject positions; citizen participation, public dialogue and building intercommunal spaces; and epistemological transformation, methodological pluralism and interdisciplinarity.

### **Decolonisation and the reclamation of history.**

As reflected upon earlier, a central feature of the Apartheid Archive Project has been to allow for the inclusion of the previously silenced voices and experiences of marginalised social groups within the apartheid archive. Here in particular, the basic community psychology values of social justice, inclusivity and respect for diversity, and empowerment (Rappaport, 1977; Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001) find resonance within the project in its attempts to further *democratise* the archive. In addition, this archival expansion process is also premised on an ethical obligation to witness, record, reclaim and acknowledge the historical experiences of others, so as to ensure that present and future generations are able to come to terms with this history, to integrate it and to learn from it, and to hopefully avoid similar catastrophic social engineering endeavours in future.

There is of course already a considerable body of knowledge concerned with developing modalities of psychological praxis directed towards promoting social justice and decolonisation. For example, Fanon (1991), Memmi (1984) and Biko (2004), amongst others, have written powerfully about the effects of colonisation and oppression on those who are marginalised and excluded. These writers have argued that histories of colonisation brought about significant social and psychological disorganisation through disconnecting communities from their histories, languages, social relations and ways of being.

Smith (1999), in her reflections on the impacts of imperialism and colonialism on indigenous communities, implicates academic knowledge and knowledge production as

central to colonisation and goes on to argue for a framework for self-determination, social justice and decolonisation. For her, this includes numerous projects such as the deconstruction and reclamation of history. She notes that “[h]istory has been told from the vantage point of colonizers, but history is also important for understanding the present and reclaiming history is critical to decolonization. [...]. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges” (Smith, 1999: 34). These alternative knowledges open up new possibilities for knowing, being and doing in the world. “This in turn requires a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand and then act upon history. [...]. Telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past are all strategies which are commonly employed by indigenous peoples, struggling for justice. [...]. [T]he need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance” (1999: 34-35).

Similarly, Bulhan (1985) argues that empowerment through organised social activity of the oppressed should be a central task for liberation psychology. The aim of such activity is the restoration of individual biographies and collective histories that have been “derailed, stunted, and/or made appendage to those of others” (1985: 277). The reclamation of history is thus integrally related to the decolonisation project, and in an ongoing racialised social context such as post-apartheid South Africa, such decolonisation imperatives remain ever salient today.

### **Forging collective memories and alternate subject positions.**

Arising from the reclamation of history is the opportunity to explore and co-create collective memories based on social groups’ experiences of collective historical traumas, thereby fostering greater levels of communal interdependence as well as the possibilities for new permutations of subjectivities and collective social identities to emerge that have hitherto been unavailable to these social groups.

Here, we argue that the invitation to write stories about memories of experiences of racism during apartheid is an invitation to claim painful personal stories, but to do so within the plotline of a collective history – stories and a collective history which have been silenced and are at risk of erasure. In our view, the Apartheid Archive Project is a potentially valuable mechanism for the recovery of collective memory. Remembering experiences of racism is central to naming and coming to understand everyday processes of apartheid oppression, but also to recognising that our experiences resonate across entire collectives to greater or lesser extents. Shefer (2010) as well as Sullivan and Stevens (2010) have already shown that the opportunity to tell stories within the Apartheid Archive Project has allowed narrators and researchers to realise the exceptional nature of these experiences of everyday racism as victims and as perpetrators of racism. It can be argued that remembering through the story is part of the process of deconstructing the social and historical conditions that impacted upon people’s lives and is also the impetus for generating new understandings of oneself, of others and of history.

Remembering also opens up the opportunities for the recovery of historical memory (Martin-Baro, 1994), that is, for recovering and affirming ways of being and doing that have been silenced, distorted, and/or eroded because of domination and colonisation (see **Native nostalgia** by Dlamini, 2009). This process of remembering is a collective and relational process that is central to cultural renewal and collective remembering provides the resources for belonging and social identity construction (Apfelbaum, 1999;

2000). “To create a history is, therefore, a response – a manner of affirming the existence of the (group) on a terrain other than that reserved for it up to that point by the dominant group” (Apfelbaum, 1999: 272).

Thus, through forging and taking ownership of collective memories, social categories come to redefine themselves, and in the context of reclaiming previously elided collective memories, opens up the possibilities for re-imagining the nature of the individual and social group’s available subject positions and identities for the present and future.

### **Citizen participation, public dialogue and building intercommunal spaces.**

In contrast to the critique of the academy and its complicity in re-inscribing forms of marginalisation, offered by writers such as hooks (1990) and Spivak (1988), community psychology has emphasized issues of community empowerment, expert depowerment, citizen participation and sense of community in fostering transformation towards more equitable social relations and general population well-being (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). This has resulted in more participatory forms of praxis that have attempted to reduce the distance between practitioners and the communities alongside and within which they work.

Within the Apartheid Archive Project as well, the actual processes involved in the construction of the project and its related activities have involved creating spaces within which academics and activists can promote broader public engagement with the recovery of historical memory. For those involved in the project as researchers, the project has meant the construction of an *intercommunal* space where people who have been and continue to be positioned differently because of apartheid and the related history of colonialism can converge to participate in the deconstruction and reconstruction of symbolic resources. As Watkins and Shulman (2008: 130) have noted, “[p]art of the work of liberation psychologies is to build intercommunity spaces of recollection and to support the formation of new types of critical subjectivity that might allow us to enter into them. A catalogue of the effects of collective trauma and colonialism is part of the work of building new spaces for dialogue”.

Thus, actual settings such as broad-based, public conferences that have become integral to the Apartheid Archive Project may be viewed as an intercommunal space. It is in this space where academics are afforded the opportunity to critically reflect upon their own positioning and identities and construct new ways of mobilising the academy for social change. This is a significant opportunity because, as critical theorists have highlighted, it will be imperative for those in the academy to engage other subjectivities in order to cross boundaries and to “renounce sympathetic leanings to move toward an emphatic, ethical and moral scholarship” (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005: 298).

Such intercommunal spaces offer up opportunities to examine the ways in which participation in the project has impacted upon the subjectivities of different members of the broader research group, but also how an engagement with the citizenry has shaped the nature of the project, its trajectories, findings and knowledge products. Such a relational approach to understanding the development and utility of intercommunal spaces foregrounds the dialectical relationship between formal knowledge production processes within the academy and the organic intellectual processes that Gramsci (1971) refers to, becoming a space for decolonisation praxis itself.

### **Epistemological transformation, methodological pluralism and interdisciplinarity.**

Following on Smith's (1999) assertion that integral to decolonisation and liberatory praxis is the recovery of the epistemological foundations of marginalised and indigenous communities, a central objective of the Apartheid Archive Project is to uncover alternative epistemic traditions and trajectories that allow for different ways of analysing and therefore of knowing, understanding, being and doing in the world.

What this allows for within the context of re-engaging the archive, expanding it and potentially contributing to alternative readings and accounts of our histories, is a situation where we avoid reproducing knowledge that is already circumscribed and thereby *write what **they** like*, but instead, that we revive Biko's (2004) injunction to "*write what **I [or we]** like*".

Writers such as Reyes Cruz and Sonn (2010) have argued that deep-seated, traditional epistemological assumptions in many approaches to community psychological inquiry have undermined more progressive and transformative approaches to research and action. They argue that interpretive approaches that are evident in interdisciplinary areas such as critical race research and feminist research may offer valuable theoretical and practical resources for challenging structural violence and promoting social justice. The commitment to social change has meant deploying methodologies that are ethical, are transformative and that promote *voice*. For example, we have already seen theatrical productions, photographic exhibitions, and literary readings, as different modes of representation within the Apartheid Archive Project. These diverse modes of representation signal the possibilities for more inclusive ways of knowing and doing as well as modes of social action (Gergen & Gergen, 2010). However, these different modes of representation have not been fully theorised as part of the broader Apartheid Archive Project, and as such, presents us with an array of potentially productive avenues for developing liberation-oriented approaches for the social sciences more broadly.

As the project develops further, new possibilities for interdisciplinary collaboration will no doubt also emerge. Although many encourage interdisciplinarity as central to tackling social issues, there are deep political differences associated with knowledge production within and across disciplines that will however need to be navigated and negotiated. For those in psychology, for example, qualitative approaches to inquiry remain mostly marginal to the broader field. Collaborating across disciplines and utilising different modes of representation will bring with it new challenges related to the quality and standards of these collaborative endeavours. There are also likely to be questions about ways of knowing and how impacts and outcomes will be evaluated - that is, what are the implications of interdisciplinarity for the ways in which different disciplines validate their knowledges? These discussions pertaining to standards and quality are not new and are currently taking place within the broader interdisciplinary area of qualitative inquiry (see for example, Gergen & Gergen, 2010). For many, the key answer lies in the extent to which research and action is meaningful, ethical, democratic and contributes to social change. The mere accumulation of scientific and expert knowledge is not given primacy under these circumstances (Duncan & Bowman, 2009), and as Martin-Baro (1994: 28-29) notes, "to acquire new psychological knowledge it is not enough to place ourselves in the perspective of the people; it is necessary to involve ourselves in a new praxis, an activity of transforming reality that

will let us know not only about what it is but also about what it is not, and by which we may try to orient ourselves toward what ought to be”.

Similarly, Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) have suggested that the idea of *psychopolitical validity* should be a key criterion for assessing these complex interdisciplinary social interventions. This concept draws together psychological and political factors in understanding the promotion of well-being and liberation, focusing centrally on dynamics of power and their disruption. Epistemological transformation, methodological pluralism and interdisciplinarity are thus central to the current activities of the Apartheid Archive Project, and are likely to become more integral to the project as it develops, thereby opening up new liberatory possibilities for knowledge production processes that transcend the traditions, conventions and insularities that are often associated with formal disciplines within the academy today.

## **CONCLUSION.**

In conclusion, this article has highlighted the timely nature of initiatives that seek to re-examine, augment and expand what is inscribed in the apartheid archive today, especially in the context of understanding the persistence and emergence of old and new forms of racialisation in contemporary South Africa. Furthermore, we argue that such initiatives offer important spaces to engage in political, psychosocial and psychological work for collectives and individuals in post-conflict and post-authoritarian societies such as South Africa. While recognising the need for a range of data forms to populate this expanded archive, we nevertheless argue for the centrality and legitimacy of memory and narrative as critical sources of information for this archive, as these open up the possibilities for the development of a liberatory praxis that is inclusive of those on the social periphery, is anti-oppressive, and is premised on an envisaged future that is driven by social justice imperatives.

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