

Narrative Possibilities of the Past for the Future: Nostalgia and Hope

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This article explores the ways in which narratives of the past may provide resources for articulating future possibilities. In societies with a history of socio-political conflict, such as South Africa, the past is typically construed as territory to be left behind, negated, and dissolved in the solutions of hard-won democratic discourses, which galvanize us to construct social and personal futures that bear no resemblance to this past. Narratives of the past serve as morality tales of warning or celebratory accounts of overcoming, and nostalgic recollection is by definition rendered regressive, implying a rejection of the current political landscape by those who have experienced a loss of illegitimate power. However, this article argues that this conceptualization of nostalgia as inevitably reactionary may blind us to possibilities for employing the resources of the past in a different way. Perhaps nostalgia is not so much a longing for the way things were, as a longing for futures that never came or horizons of possibilities that have been foreclosed by the unfolding of events. Perhaps nostalgia is the desire not to be who we once were, but to be, once again, our potential future selves. The article asks whether nostalgic narratives of the past may provide resources for the present and the construction of a society characterized by peace and social justice, for our imaginative reach toward new possible horizons and hopeful futures.

Keywords: narrative, nostalgia, hope, imagination, change

This article explores a notion of nostalgia that entails recollection of past events counterposed with a notion of hope that entails projection into the future. This may seem a rather strange entry point, and perhaps requires some explanation. My interest in the question of nostalgia stems from my theoretical interest understanding human subjectivity in narrative terms and from my practical engagement with youth. In working with young South Africans over the last decade, both in academic classrooms and in

the context of a youth development program for schoolchildren, my focus has been on the ways in which current identities are informed by history, and the possibilities for constructing alternative future personal and social identities. For me, working with youth is an act of imagination, creating new storylines oriented toward a future that we hope will be more just and more equal than our current shared worlds or our own histories. In the South African context, where the past is quite literally “another country,” there is an exaggeration of the archetypal hope invested in the youth, who, we hope, will make the world a better place. Living postapartheid, there is much to celebrate as the world of young people with whom we work is indeed very different to our own conflictual, racialized past. As teachers and activists (and of course as parents), we act toward the future with an orientation of hope, and in creative anticipation of possibilities. In this terrain, engagement with youth suggests the possibility of writing ourselves into the future by extending our horizons in the lives of others.

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A Narrative Frame

Future storylines are, however, always constrained by available repertoires or the cultural stock of stories that characterize the sociohistorical world within which young people live. As McAdams (2001) notes, "It is painfully clear that life stories echo gender and class constructions in society and reflect, in one way or another, prevailing patterns of hegemony in the economic, political, and cultural contexts wherein human lives are situated" (p. 114). The mythical Ghanaian bird, Sankofa, flies forward while facing backward to gather the wisdom of the past. Kierkegaard's proverbial saying, "We live forward but understand backward" (cited in Crites, 1986, p. 165) seems to apply not only to the personal linkages and coherences that each of us must construct, but also to the possibilities for national narratives, particularly where there is such heavy baggage in our collective memory, or what Freeman (2010) calls our "narrative unconscious." We need to think about the past in ways that will enable us to rethink the present and construct the future.

My question (and this article still has the status of a question rather than an answer) is whether nostalgic longing may provide resources for the present and for our imaginative reach toward new possible horizons. Perhaps nostalgia is not only a longing for the way things were, but also a longing for futures that never came, or for horizons of possibilities that seem to have been foreclosed by the unfolding of events. Perhaps nostalgia is the desire not to be who we once were, but to be, once again, our potential future selves, selves not yet formed, still lost on early egocentric and eccentric maps, still finding pathways forward. In this way, I construct nostalgia as a kind of backward-looking hope, or the counterpart of an orientation toward the future. The object of nostalgia (and hope) is neither place nor time, but the subject, the self that was and is yet to be. These earlier potential selves cannot, of course, be recovered directly, and can only be known from our current positioning in the present.

My own subjective recollections of earlier selves are entangled with the recollections of others and with the threads of meaning making that are the stuff of intellectual life and communities of scholarship to which I belong in the present. The form of the article reflects this

entanglement, of the personal and the political, of lived experience and theoretical analysis. Two narrative sources provide the basis for reflection: (a) The recorded stories of the Apartheid Archive (2011); and (b) the accounts of artists and analysis of social scientists at the third Apartheid Archive Conference in Johannesburg in July 2011 (e.g., Gevisser, 2011; Menon, 2011; Wicomb, 2011). Instead of erasing the author's own narrative history, I have inserted snippets of my own story as counterpoints through which to read these stories. In this way, the article offers a layered reading of the past and, by engaging in what Boym (2007) refers to as "reflective nostalgia," suggests ways of turning this reflection forward, toward the future.

An important aspect of my story that provides the specific lens for these readings, is the way in which I came to the discipline of psychology, via the circuitous routes of literature and linguistics. This trajectory led me to the field of narrative psychology, which entails the conceptualization of subjectivity as story. In very broad strokes, this approach proposes that narrative provides us with a conceptual framework for thinking about human life as temporal, and subjectivity as made and remade in the recollection of the past from the standpoint of the present, with an interest in the future (Crites, 1986). This way of thinking about psychological life necessitates the insertion of individuals into history or, more importantly, from my particular perspective, inserts history and the public events and meanings of collective social life, into the making of our most private selves. Who we are in the present is a recollected self, a person knitted together through the "slender thread of memory" (Berger, 1973, p. 124).

Collective memory of the history of apartheid is well documented in national narratives and in the memoirs and stories of important political heroes. Beyond the popular media and academic texts that record this history, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a platform for victims and perpetrators to both tell and hear stories of their individual experiences. The public record of the brutal violence of a society riven by racialized conflict creates the material from which the grand narrative of apartheid and the "new" South Africa is fashioned. As important as this is, the Apartheid Archives Project (2011) of the University of the

Witwatersrand was established in recognition of what these records omit, the stories of ordinary people who may not have been at the center of the political conflict, but whose lives nevertheless embodied and enacted the apartheid story. The details and particularities of these narratives offer us a view of the nuances of our conflictual past and the ways in which “everyday racism” (Essed, 1990) was experienced, provoking us to “explore side shadows and back alleys, rather than the straight road of progress; . . . [creating] detour[s] from the deterministic narratives of history” (Boym, 2007, p. 9). In July 2011, the third annual Apartheid Archive Conference was held, focusing on the theme of nostalgia. This article reflects on the archive stories themselves, the narratives of participants at the conference (including my own), and more generally, on the generative possibilities of narrative theories of selves and societies. In particular, this reflexive task suggests that reading the past by including rather than rejecting nostalgic recollections may paradoxically provide hopeful resources for the future.

Redefining Nostalgia: Childhoods Revisited

Nostalgia is commonly defined as the painful longing for a lost home, a yearning to return. This longing for home is, of course, the subject of the literatures (and other art forms) of exile: It is this quality that we hear in the jazz music of Hugh Masekela or read in the words of the novelist, Es’kia Mphahlele, the rendering of home as the place from which the artist is absent. In apartheid South Africa as in other societies in conflict, this “absence” was felt not only by those away from home, most poignantly exiled against their will, but even by those who remained at home but did not feel at home and yearned for a future South Africa in which to be “at home.” This complex relation of loss and longing is re-experienced in the present where art functions to construct an “ambiguous relation between the past and the present . . . where a sense of loss associated with the past coexists with a sense of longing associated with the future” (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 936).

But this evocative quality is not only to be found in great art; in the stories of ordinary people in the Apartheid Archive, we also find this sensual and emotive rendering of place, the

smells, the quality of light and the sounds of our mother tongues.

[It] reminds me of blue skies and thunderous tears from the heavens, the colors of the Highveld in summer but especially in winter, the people of South Africa—the glorious mixture of Afrikaans, Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa, S’pedi, Tswana, Ndebele— of the richness of diversity and the pain of separation. I am reminded of dom passes and yellow police vans— humiliation and suffering of an ignorant 10-year-old educated by a slap in the face.

My memories are disjointed, images of baobab trees and prickly pears which I transformed into fairies with the help of a few rose petals. The bush was exciting, full of all sorts of perils. Mambas sometimes lived in the banana tree in our garden and crocs lived in the river. They were known to eat children, but I was safe because they only ate Black children who were silly enough to bathe in the river. These perils fascinated me and I loved the wildness surrounding my cocooned house with its little bridge over the stream made just for me (Apartheid Archive Narrative N60).

And sounds of a landscape less fondly recalled, but nonetheless viscerally made present for us:

You know, in the village we didn’t have electricity then, and at nighttime we used to just fear . . . we used to just fear the unknown. When you are sitting and it is quiet and nighttime, there you hear sounds of donkeys, you hear dogs barking, and from the far, far distance you hear hyenas. And if they send you outside, I mean most of the things were outside, say the firewood, and they ask you to collect . . . ’cause we didn’t have toilets outside the house, and you wouldn’t go outside at night ’cause we would fear snakes. So we used to bring a bucket for Grannies and things (Apartheid Archive Narrative S18).

Of course, the place of “home” evoked in such sensory details of memory can be returned to even if by long circuitous and sometimes (quite literally) torturous routes. However, it is not just place but time that we long to recuperate, “the time of our childhood, the slower rhythm of our dreams” (Boym, 2007, p.8), and temporal reversal is quite simply not possible. Given this impossibility, nostalgia might be rightly dismissed as irrational, romantically naive, and dangerously sentimental (Medalie, 2010), occluding the conditions of the present that demand our engagement. However, I want to argue otherwise, suggesting that, in nostalgia we can (not that we inevitably will, but that we can) find the seeds of possibility, the traces of life lived resiliently and agentially. In particular, the longing for home, for the past, can be interpreted as about more than physical place

and pivotally entails a longing for be-longing, for insertion into networks of people. In one sense, nostalgia may be inevitable, even where, politically speaking, the “good old days” were clearly “the bad old days” because of the personal trajectory of aging. For all of us, the past is the territory of our lost youth.

McAdams (2001) notes that, regardless of the age of the narrator, life histories are characterized by a “narrative bump” in which disproportionate prominence is afforded to the experiences of youth (mid teens through mid twenties), and in which our identities and life trajectories are established. For those of us on the other side of this narrative bump, the loss of this fluidity or the narrowing of horizons that comes with aging means that we often have the sense that youth is wasted on the young. In some ways, the human capacity for agency seems heightened in youth even when lived under conditions of violent political conflict and powerful structural constraints. I do not want to underestimate the differences in the ways in which these structural constraints (particularly “race”) were (and continue to be) experienced in our divided society. But the fact that apartheid childhoods can be fondly recalled, as people like Dlamini (2009) and Van Wyk (2004, 2010) have done so vividly, suggests that human life is not fully determined, and always contains within it the possibility of agentic action and imagined alternatives. Maslow’s hierarchy, which suggests that people’s needs can be understood as hierarchically organized from the most basic biological needs (food and shelter) to the most complex (what he calls self-actualization), has been incorporated into a taken-for-granted common sense, creating an impoverished view of the poor or oppressed, who even in conditions of extreme oppression, live lives of active meaning making and imagination. Pumla Gqola (2011) has recently spoken of an “African feminist imagination,” and the ways in which possibilities for joy and sensual pleasure, rather than being deferred dreams, coexist with the effects of sexist and racist oppression. Dlamini’s *Native Nostalgia* (2009) has done us a great service in challenging us to think about the past in more nuanced ways. He is open to the charge of playing into the hands of racist, Afro-pessimist sentiment, and even the title of his book has been sufficient to provoke outrage.

Though in Dlamini’s case these charges might be relatively easily dismissed, they require more serious response from those whose narratives of youth and childhood are of privilege, where nostalgic recollection may represent little more than a wish to return to that playground of luxury. During the Apartheid Archive Conference, Mark Gevisser (2011) told of his childhood game played with a simple blue map book hidden in the back seat of a car, tracing the spaces of his home city Johannesburg. His evocative narratives enticed me not only to think of his spaces and places, but produced my own interior replay of landscapes of play; of quiet, solitary places where I read, and read, and read, but also, of wide open natural spaces, tall grass, and trees. I think that my overwhelming sense of childhood nostalgia is about space and openness and distance that I could walk or places where I could hide. And the loss of this “freedom” evokes nostalgic recollection from an adult woman who is not free to roam streets or of course climb trees! My childhood was not idyllic, and indeed I am now old enough to have nostalgic memories not only of youth, but of early adulthood. My memories are ambivalently read retrospectively through a film or layer of shame and guilt, in that I know that these freedoms were not shared. A vivid, visceral memory from the Apartheid Archive poignantly highlights the exclusion of Black children from this recollected playground of my youth:

As a precocious reader, I had read all the books for my age group and older that were available in the “non-White” section of the Children’s Library, which was separated from the “White” section by a cage-like wire mesh. The frustration of seeing what to me was a vast array of shiny, unattainable new books in the forbidden White section, came to a head on that particular Saturday (Apartheid Archive Narrative N30).

Some argue that these freedoms for White children were built on the basis of exploitation and exclusion, and were only possible because others did not have them. This may be so, though I refuse to believe it is necessarily so, and therefore, I hope for a world where these experiences are possible for all. I do not think it is utopian to hope for all children to have play spaces and books to read; I share Gevisser’s (2011) sense of being “nostalgic for the youth of today.” However, this may be a rather different nostalgic longing, a reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2007), recuperating the past in ways that can be

directed forward rather than attempting to recreate in the present, the worlds and spaces of the past. In this view, “longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment, and critical reflection” (Boym, 2007, p. 15).

Restoring, Erasing, or Remaking the Past

Attempts to either restore or erase earlier versions of the world in which some people felt at home by virtue of the exclusion of others are quite concretely reflected in the remaking of space symbolized in the renaming of streets. The cityscape of my hometown, Durban, provides a fascinating place for thinking about the politics and very personal visceral reactions of people who feel either a new sense of belonging or a displacement by the erasure of old street names and their replacement with new ones that are spray painted over in endless rounds of naming and erasing, which seems to mean that sometimes we are simply nowhere! The most recent very crude act of this kind, public because it was caught on camera, did not happen in Durban: The attempt to spray paint over the street sign for Nelson Mandela Boulevard with the name of one of Chris Hani’s assassins, “Derby-Lewis”. This absurd action makes overt the sense of loss that is expressed in more subtle ways. It is intriguing to me how often I encounter among young white students (and even grown-up colleagues who should know better) the manipulation of the language of redress to assert unfair discrimination or the inverted idea of “Black racism.” This position, however, is not nostalgic in quality and is often coupled with an urgent assertion that the past is past and is irrelevant to our current context. This means that it is possible for white South Africans to quite candidly make statements such as these recently made on the letters page of the Mail & Guardian newspaper:

Although far from eradicated, White racism is yesterday’s problem. Black racism, which is barely acknowledged, let alone confronted, will prove a much harder nut to crack (James Van der Heever, 2011, emphasis added).

For my part, am I supposed to feel shame for the suffering inflicted on people of color under apartheid? And am I supposed to acknowledge that I “benefitted” from apartheid and do something about it? Well, I feel no shame whatever for apartheid—neither did I invent

it. . . . And did I benefit from their apartheid laws? I took a job under the pervading system of job reservation, but the extent to which I benefitted, or would not have benefitted without the system, is questionable and perhaps not measurable. The question is therefore somewhat meaningless (Oliver Price, 2011, emphasis added).

The refusal to look back, the refusal to incorporate narratives of the past into our current understandings of ourselves and our society, creates a kind of paralysis, paradoxically fixing us in that very past and obscuring possibilities for the future. Conversely, by attending to the past, recollecting it, we can also recognize how that past (and our younger selves) could have been different. Mark Freeman’s recent book, entitled *Hindsight* (2010), explores how narrative recollection may entail what he terms “moral lateness:” a recognition, after the fact, that alternative, more moral, actions were possible. Of course the fact that one now struggles to find a South African who supported apartheid reflects the idea that 20/20 vision is always possible in hindsight, that it is a distortion of those earlier realities. But looking back may enable us to be reflexive about our current context. Through the distance across which the stories of our past must be read, we may be able to incorporate new versions of ourselves for acting in the present toward the future. Freeman suggests that this process, although it seems like an individual task or project, may provide us with resources for thinking through our relations with one another: “The ‘could have’ or ‘should have’ of hindsight, in cases like these, thus moves beyond the confines of the individual, bearing within it a social, relational dimension. The eyes of others are within” (Freeman, 2010, p. 79). Extracts from three different narratives in the *Apartheid Archive* express this kind of hindsight, stories of missed opportunities or choices that would now be made differently:

As on other occasions that I’d had no control over, my prepubescent anger threatened to overwhelm me and soon we were furiously raining fists on each other. And then somewhere in the midst of the litany of swearing in Xhosa and beating, I uttered the words I most regret, “you kaffir!” The energy of the fight prematurely waned and we both stood there heaving and defeated. I, with a hand to my black and steadily swelling eye, and he with a strange look on his physically unscathed face. I immediately wished that I could erase those words from my mind. I wished my opponent would get

up in the morning having forgotten what I'd said. (Apartheid Archive Narrative N1).

I remember later that year wearing a yellow ribbon on my school blazer because the wife of one of my father's friends had been detained. I also remember that my parents stayed seated at every school-prize giving when Die Stem [Apartheid National Anthem] was played. I remember being embarrassed and wishing that they would stand up. Now I just wish I had stayed seated myself (Apartheid Archive Narrative N49).

Reflecting on my relationship with Emily leaves me with one final thought. It is both a hope and a regret—the hope that she was aware of the central role that she played in my life and the regret that she moved away before I had the opportunity to tell her myself. I left home to attend university where I learned all about race, class, and gender, yet this awareness only translated into a full appreciation of the one person in my life who was immeasurably oppressed by these very forces when it was too late (Emphasis added, Apartheid Archive Narrative N15).

The story of this kind that resonates most strongly for me is Sarah Nuttall's (2009) account, in the *Load Shedding* collection of autobiographies, of separating from her black nanny to ride the apartheid bus on a shopping trip into central Johannesburg. She berates her younger self, through the window of that bus, "Stupid girl! Stupid girl!" I am on that bus with the young Sarah and I accept her judgment of the multiple trivial acts whereby we gave the racist system life. I construe these retrospective insights as "nostalgic" because they are about recognizing the absence or rupture of connection with others with whom we now as adults wish to be connected. I do not wish to suggest that these retrospective insights are particularly praiseworthy nor that they absolve blame retrospectively. Perhaps this "moral lateness" is just that—simply too little, too late. But in recognizing that the past need not have been what it was, we are better able to generate options for how to live now and the kinds of futures that may be possible. This recollection of the past may sometimes take the form of correcting a false sense of coherence in the past or posing choices or opportunities that may now be gone:

I recall that my family was not particularly politicized, so that experiences that should have rankled often went unquestioned (e.g., my father having to obtain a permit from the local police station on the rare occasions when my parents had to drive from Natal to Johannesburg to attend a funeral; I'm still not sure if this was required because they were going to be temporarily in the Transvaal, or because they had to drive through the

Orange Free State for part of the journey—perhaps it was both).

What would have happened to me if I tried to skip the country according to the plan? Would I have been arrested? Would I have been traced to see the route and contacts I made along the way? Would I have landed in an ANC camp only to be framed as an informer by Imbokodo? Who knows?

At least I am still here to tell my story. And I am still here to try and juggle not to forget but not to reproduce my apartheid past. (Emphasis added, Apartheid Archive Narrative N63).

Recollection of this kind may not ordinarily be afforded the label "nostalgic," purportedly offering a clearer vision than was possible at the time, rather than infusing past events with a romantic light and veiling the present in loss and a sense of permanent absence. Pamuk's (2004, p. 83) discussion of Turkish melancholia for the lost Ottoman Empire, *huzun*, suggests that nostalgic recollection is akin to "the emotion a child might feel while looking through a steamy window. Now we begin to understand *huzun* as, not the melancholy of a solitary person, but the black mood shared by millions of people together." In an ironic way, it seems that the steamy window of the South African present offers a view of a past characterized by apparent moral or political clarity. What we yearn for is not only our own individual lost youth, but also for the lost youth of the "new" South Africa, the birth of possibility. This is a more recent past than the apartheid past of the archive, but I think we sometimes forget that it too is past and connected with, even rooted in, apartheid rather than representing the beginning of now. A snippet of narrative from a younger contributor to the archive alerts us to the "pastness," the historicity of this time as she reflects on it with a sense of loss and longing for something that she never experienced:

When I finally went to university I was envious that my parents had a definite cause to fight for. By 1992 Mandela was being released and apartheid was supposed to be over. Although there were definitely still important issues that had to be addressed, it felt like the battle had been won. It seemed to me that things were a lot more complicated. I was disappointed when a group of students were arrested and I had not been one of them, I guess my parents' political activity had seemed quite romantic to me. (Emphasis added, Apartheid Archive Narrative N49).

For those of us who are in that peculiar no-person's land called "middle age," our personal "narrative bumps" coincide (more or less) with

the euphoric moments of the birth of the “new” South Africa. For example, the day Mandela was released, the snaky lines of the first election, and nostalgia for this period, although differently experienced, is probably more shared than the divided pasts of our childhoods. What I think underpins the emotion is again about a sense of belonging, of community, of connectiveness. There are certainly evident dangers in nostalgic recollections of this time in our history and the grand nationalist narratives that attend it. Dilip Menon (2011) comments that South Africa’s transition to democracy was unusual in that it was not followed by the conflagration of violence that happened in other places, such as India, postindependence. Our birth was nonetheless violent. I recently made my first visit to the Apartheid Museum and was struck by what I had forgotten, or rather, what I had reordered in my memory of this time. I refer here to the violent conflict, particularly in my home province, KwaZulu-Natal, between Inkatha and the ANC in the lead up to the first democratic elections of 1994, and I think also of Chris Hani’s assassination in 1993, which threatened to derail the tense negotiations in process. Of course, in one sense, I remember these violent events very clearly, but in my mind they are consigned to the long, rather than the short past, with Hani’s death somehow simultaneous with the apartheid state’s murder of Steven Bantu Biko in 1977, and the violent clashes between Inkatha and ANC supporters mingled with the state brutality of the apartheid regime at the height of its power in the 1980s, rather than in its dying moments.

Nostalgic Pasts and Hopeful Futures

I think the risks of nostalgia for this time in our history, for the beginnings of democracy, lie in the construction of the “battle as won.” As the young narrator from the archive puts it, the best is past, the present requires nothing of me and the future will not be of my making. This sense of being trapped in the present where hope can only be directed backward rather than forward produces a kind of psychological (and political) paralysis, what Kierkegaard calls the “unhappiest” state, a person who is “confused in his recollection by the light of hope, frustrated in his hope by the ghosts of recollection” (Kierkegaard, 1987, p. 229). Entrapment in an in-

active, passive present thus reflects a confusion of past and future, an inability to conceive of a (hopeful) future. Samantha Vice (2005, 2011) has argued that a hopeful orientation is a moral obligation, although I would part company with her in her restriction of this obligation to those who have been advantaged by the past and in the formulation of this hopefulness as primarily a personal, introspective task. It seems to me that a hopeful orientation necessarily entails hope in and for others. Vice suggests that the antithesis of hope is not anger or despair, but cynicism. Rather than the commonplace sense that the cynic wakes the rest of us up from a dreamlike stupor to alert us with clear-sightedness to “what’s really going on,” Vice argues that a cynical orientation leaves no room for critique, as it is assumed in advance that it would have no effect. Conversely, nostalgic recollection and hopefulness place us at an imaginative distance from current circumstances, suggesting that the world could possibly be different. This distantiation (Ricoeur, 1981) from present realities may serve to induce a kind of romantic longing for the past or a passive waiting for a future that never comes, but it may also be productively galvanized in creating possibility, living a meaningful life, and provoking critical action. The dispassionate stance of a distant observer is a far more acceptable position for academics. Neither nostalgia nor hope is easily commensurate with this position, and it is difficult to work in ways that make us vulnerable to outcomes beyond our control.

The original conceptualization of this article was that I would excavate the archives for empirical instances of formulations of the future, either hoped for or feared, in the past. But this process was quite difficult, near futile, and there are a range of possible reasons for this. First, the ways in which the archived stories were elicited emphasized recollection, a retelling of early memory, of the apartheid past, now gone. Second, there is the assumption that those things that were wished for or feared in the past that have not come to pass in the present, are not relevant in the narration of that past. Third, there is a paucity of subjunctive expression in English which relies on the clumsy constructions of “should have/could have/would have.” To refer fleetingly again to Pamuk (2004), he tells us that in Turkish, there is a particular tense that refers to recounted events or experiences that are

based on hearsay rather than memory, suggesting the incorporation of fictive “memory” or possibility, in narrative form. Perhaps the lack of such markers in the English language is indicative of how we might value pragmatism and actual, real, “true” accounts. It certainly alerts us to the importance of how linguistic and other symbolic resources might constrain and enable our narratives, our interpretations of the world, and ourselves. And the issue of language is paramount in making it possible to communicate freely with one another, to eavesdrop, and thus to immerse ourselves in a place and its people, and to feel at home. The languages we learn reflect an investment in whom we want to talk to and listen to in the future.

Searches for the terms “future,” “wish,” or “hope” produced very little, but where they did occur, which I found interesting because I define myself as an educator, they were most often associated with education, often told retrospectively as a story that culminates in present personal achievement or overcoming of obstacles. For example:

I feel proud, in fact, even in my life I think I chose the right path. I mean in my village, where I came from, things were different then, now of course there have been developments now. I was the first person, you know out of all the boys I grew up with I was the first to go to university and be a graduate, and I mean, others from my class went to colleges, to Technikons, but to get to a university degree level, I am the only person in the village (Apartheid Archive Narrative S18).

However, the stories told of education are also tales of lost opportunity, of lost hope, of futures truncated or stillborn. The terrain of education more than any other is the place where our dreams (individually and collectively) have been so violently dashed, where the promised future has simply not been delivered, and where the hopes of youth are daily eroded. These are the stories that we are writing now, stories of futures being lost in the present:

So that’s how things were, that’s how I consider it bad, because we didn’t really get education as providing a future for us, but still, I mean, I managed to survive, but all my other brothers didn’t actually.

There’s a sad thought behind it, you know. You know, when you think about, sometimes when you go through suffering, you think things could have been better. I mean, for me I’ve got two brothers. I mean, the brother I was telling you about, and I felt such pain for him. For me to watch, I mean I was at the university at that time. I mean to watch him making these applications, buying newspapers, making applications, cir-

cling things. I mean I saw these reply letters, most of them were rejecting. I mean to me, it was like, my mother’s child is trying. That thing really hurt me. I mean he is trying very hard. I mean he used to buy newspapers every Wednesday. It’s not something that you can blame anyone, but the fact that he was trying and he wasn’t getting anywhere (Apartheid Archive Narrative S18).

Reading the Past, Reading Others, Reading Ourselves

I am suggesting that narratives of the past may serve not to restore an earlier time or the place of “home,” but to dislocate our positioning in the present, to open not only windows on the world, but new ways of viewing ourselves. I am intrigued by a word that emerges repeatedly when we talk of our responses to stories and to art in general: We speak of being “moved.” It’s an unusual word because, of course, it is metaphorical but so sedimented in our language as to seem to refer concretely to an actuality. What is it that moves? In my mind’s eye, I see the soprano singer, Sibongile Khumalo at the screening and discussion of Philip Miller’s *Rewind Cantata* at the Apartheid Archives Conference (Apartheid Archive, 2011). She recounted and reenacted how she shifted uncomfortably in her chair on first reading the script for her part in the *Cantata* based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimony of Nomonde Calata (widow of Fort Calata, one of the famous Craddock Four murdered by the apartheid state, www.thecraddock-four.co.za). This physical movement externalized the feeling of “being moved” by these distressing stories or to their reworking in art. What moves in our encounters with great art or with the stories of others’ lives, is we ourselves. It is this “movement” or “being moved” that prevents us from simply settling back into our chairs and returning to our former selves the moment the *cantata* winds up or we close the book or we retreat from the anguish of a traumatic life story with which the teller must continue to live. The question that artists, especially writers, must ask is, “How can we create texts that will move the audience, taking them to new places of understanding and new ways of living?”

Zoe Wicomb (2011) alerts us to the necessity for reading to invoke not only affective connection, but also active, critical cognizing that will

enable us re-cognize the world of text and ourselves. In this way, the very process of reading narratives may both affirm and destabilize our understandings, our identities, our places in the world, and our relationships with the past and with others. In Ricoeur's (1981) terms, the act of reading is not about restoring or reconstituting the author's experience, meanings, or intentions, but about generating new understandings of ourselves "in front of the text," opening up possibilities for change, and suggesting that in the process of interpretation, we receive from the text an "enlarged self" (p. 143). In these terms, who we are in the present is read through the past and through the (textualized) understandings of others, by tracing the "long detour of the signs of humanity deposited in cultural works" (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 143). In this way, collective histories inform our current individual modes of being, and traces of the past create the contours of present life. This oscillation between the past and the present in the act of reading, and the demand for the suspension of the certainties of the self in its current life-world, releases new possibilities for the future, new potential selves. "As a reader, I find myself only by losing myself" (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 144).

From this perspective, the value of the Apartheid Archive lies not only in enabling people to tell their stories, but in offering us (and those who did not live through it, readers yet to be born) these narratives to be read. The narratives of "ordinary" South Africans enable us to read ourselves as "the other" (Ricoeur, 1992), to enter other worlds of place and time. Brockmeier (2009, p.228) argues that "... narrative is our most powerful device to 'subjunctivize' the world. It opens up the hypothetical, the possible, and the actual. It invites us to live in more than one reality, in more than one context of meaning, in more than one order of time." Living in more than one order of time, imaginatively entering the worlds of others, being prepared to tell and listen to stories of the past and generate storylines for imagined futures, is what makes change possible. By living imaginatively beyond the confines of the present, we may be able to conceive of ourselves, our identities, in new terms. Ndebele (2011), in his recent address at the opening of the political cartoonist, Zapiro's exhibition, *Jiving with Mandela*, makes the strong claim that the possibilities for remaking our political landscape lie in our "subjectivity." "Our salva-

tion might lie precisely there: in our subjectivity, the elemental site of our conscience, our moral sensitivity, ethical awareness, and our self-esteem. This may have become the most precious source of our future citizenship" (2011). Nostalgic recollection may point to the possibilities for agency, even under conditions of violent conflict, and offer us resources for (re)creating our subjectivity as citizens in peaceful, postconflict societies.

Conclusion

Can we turn our nostalgic longing for home, for belonging, toward the future? Can the narratives of our imperfect past that filter into our present, provoke us to seek connections and common purpose so as to identify with one another? Can we create the webs of empathetic understandings of one another to form an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983), in which our individual hopes can be joined to the hopes of others? Can we conceive of a future place in which we can all feel "at home?" As Boym (2007) suggests, "Nostalgia can be a poetic creation, an individual mechanism for survival, a countercultural practice, a poison, or a cure. It is up to us to take responsibility for our nostalgia and not let others prefabricate it for us" (p. 18). In the eloquent words of Ndebele (2011): "We have to wake up now and redream."

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