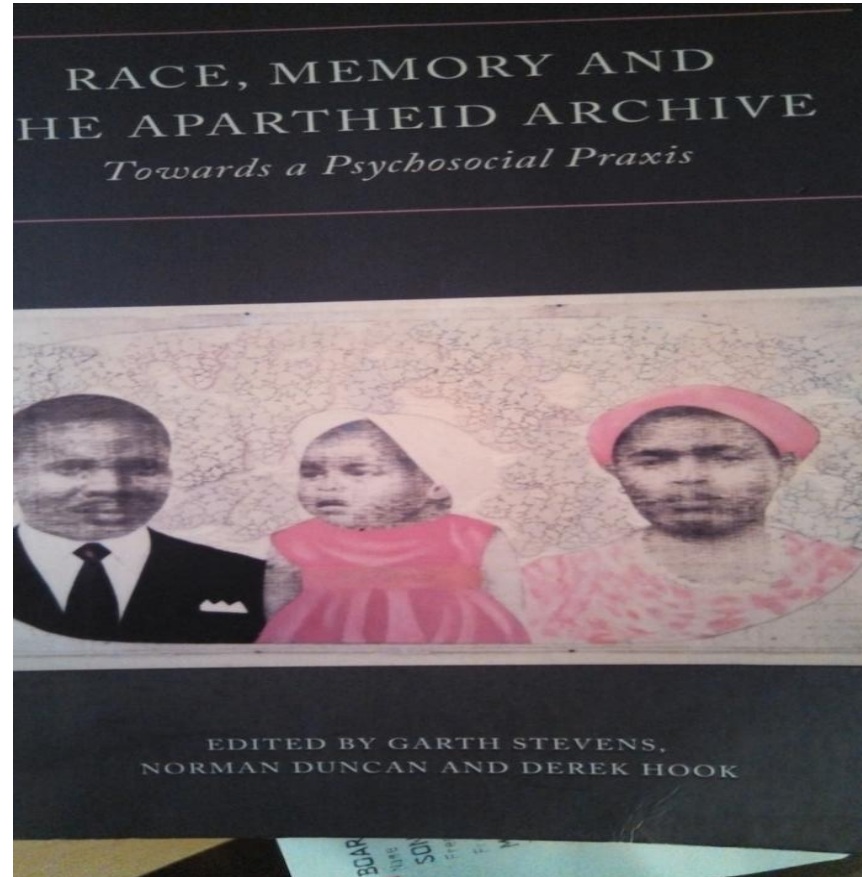


# Apartheid Archive: Racism, Memory and Belonging Among South Africans in Australia



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# Apartheid Archive: Overview

Launched in June 2009 ([www.apartheidarchive.org](http://www.apartheidarchive.org))

Broad aim of the project - "...through the collection of over 5000 narratives, to examine the nature of the experiences of ordinary South Africans under the old apartheid order and to interrogate their continuing effects on individual and group functioning in contemporary South Africa."

Objectives to be defined as the project evolves through smaller sub-projects

Data Collection through internet portal, student projects, dedicated data collection teams and researchers themselves

Not an attempt to generate *the definitive Archive*, but to seek out intersections with other similar projects on memory, recovery archiving, etc.

# Apartheid Archive: Overview

- Strengths and limitations of the TRC; occluded voices of the ordinary and mundane; partly a result of its mandate.
- Denialism and the ideology of tolerance
- Contemporary social problems that are racialised; flashpoints reflect a history that has not been fully comprehended and addressed
- The recrudescence, mutability and recalcitrance of a racist legacy can be seen in:
  - **the continued racialisation of intergroup relations and subjectivities**
  - **the vexing question of xenophobia**
  - **the emotive debates about affirmative action, employment equity and institutional transformation**
  - **the forms of ethnic and identity politics that rear their heads each time we have an election**
  - **the racialisation of social ills such as crime and HIV/AIDS**
  - **the old, new and more subtle manifestations of racism**

# Apartheid Archive: Overview

Foreground narratives of the everyday experiences of 'ordinary' South Africans during the apartheid era, rather than simply focusing on the 'grand' narratives of the past, or the privileged narratives of academic, political and social elites.

- Fill the 'forgotten' gaps interspersed between the 'grand' narratives recorded by the TRC and other more formalised archiving projects:
  - Recovery and recording
  - Speaking the unspeakable; giving voice
  - Understanding the present through the past
  - Building theory and forms of praxis

# Apartheid Archive: Concepts

The reclamation of history affords the opportunity for collective remembering of historical experiences by social groups

Archive as a social resource for those typically excluded from knowledge production and through this process expand the boundaries of who can create and have access to contributing to it

The third way relates to the politics of knowledge and knowledge production, it is concerned with developing an ethical and engaged social praxis that is critically reflexive

*critical psychosocial mnemonics* is concerned with deploying such analyses in the service of questioning and subverting relations of power through deconstructing and de-ideologising them (Martín-Baró, 1994)

# Apartheid Archive: Concepts

Form and content; object of research or a means for the study of another question

Misleading to refer to 'a story' or 'the story' as if it has an independent existence

## Stories and Narratives

Narratives never pure reflections of deeds, behaviours & events. 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

Integral to Critical Race Theory

# Sense of Community and Migration

Previous studies examining experiences of Apartheid and the implications for constructing identities and subjectivities in a new sociocultural context following migration (see Sonn, 1996; 2010; Sonn & Fisher, 2003; Sonn & Lewis, 2009)

Sense of community based on positive memories and patterns of reunion, that is on nostalgic remembering, in their country of origin

Memories of life not only about positive nostalgia, but about deconstructing and reconstructing meanings of labels and experiences

# Remembering Apartheid Racism in Australia

## Identity and Community

- Memories and experiences of the home community combine with experiences in the new socio-cultural environment as part of the processes of acculturation and community-making.

## Histories

- Histories of colonialism and racial power relations influence the acculturation and identity construction of immigrants to the United States (e.g., Bhatia and Indian Diaspora & Espiritu and Filipino) and in the Australian context (e.g., Ali & Sonn, 2010)



# Stories and analysis

Some submissions were short and anecdotal, offering snapshots of racialised encounters, and were about half-a-page in length of transcribed text. The other submissions were longer, about a full page of transcribed text. The longer stories offered more detail and followed a structure in which narrators would rearticulate their experiences of racism.

Within this broader framework I was guided by critical narrative and discourse analytic approaches (e.g., Hammack, 2010; Hiles & Čermák, 2008; Mama, 1995) to explore the stories within the broader context of immigration and displacement given that these stories were told from the vantage point of South Africans in Australia.

# Migrating for a different future

Not nostalgic and constituted by traumatic and unspoken memories – the forces that compelled them to leave and to disengage racism in search of different future for self and children (a core theme in migration work.

*“We left South Africa in the era of the start of the unrest and lobbying against Apartheid. Our children were at High School and caught up in the demonstrations. We feared for their safety and I had a sister and her husband living here, who sponsored us to migrate.” (AN3)*

# Place and everyday racialised incivilities

- Grand Apartheid and uncivil attention in everyday spaces
  - treatment of his personal belongings as objects of power relations
  - non-recognition, in asserting white privilege and relegating black people in certain workspaces.
  - *While in my office on the phone one day a rep from some company walked into my office without knocking and asked me “is hier dan nie mense nie” [are there no people here]. Well I was so stunned that my response to him was “Wat! lyk ons dan vir jou soos ‘n klomp ape!” [What, do we look like a lot of apes!]. Clearly he was looking for some white people. I told him to leave my office, knock on my door and wait until I told him to enter. I told him that my name was clearly stated on my office door and that I expected him to make himself known before entering. Well he was not happy and reported me to my head of department that at the end of the day fully agreed with me that he should have knocked and asked if there was anybody around that he could speak to concerning whatever he was there for. (AN4)*

# Current Project: Displacement, Diaspora, and Identity

- Build on AAP with stories from people who migrated post 1994.
- Interested in home and belonging in the stories
- Team gathering interviews up to 10 so far
- Focus on interviews with three people who grew up “coloured”
- Preliminary thematic analysis

# Reasons for leaving

- **Crime and safety**
- **Economic and Educational opportunities (push and pull)**
- **Family**
- **“I think you’ve got to have a lot of inner *krag*... you have to dig deep to stay because its hard on all fronts – the social front, the financial front, and you don’t even have a political affiliation because it’s all about dollars and surviving when you land and paying bills”**

# Multiple meanings of home and belonging in multiple places

Being from Cape Town and coloured as more than a label –  
lifeworld or habitas

“being Capetonian for me, is about like I said a sense of belonging, it’s the sense of what you understand about other people that does not necessarily have to be spoken or communicated or compromised on, you know what I am saying? And that goes with, I guess, when you have grown up in on place, is that you understand people and those things you know and you have to throw that manual out because when you living with people that don’t have that commonality”

# Australian Context

**“I can make myself comfortable you know what I mean, I can... I am tolerant and everything... But it’s living in Australia, living amongst Australian’s and working yet hasn’t given me a sense of belonging, like, I feel when I am in Cape Town”**

**“Australia has also made me a very private person, whereas when I was in south Africa it was all about crowds, and community, you know what I mean, I actually like being by myself now. This place has basically changed me. So when I go back home, even the way I think is different. I still think people at home are conditioned. Like even referring to the term coloured, I find it offensive now.”**

# Australian context

- I do feel much more settled in my soul in Australia. I don't feel as though I have to fight for my place to be here. I feel that I am recognised for my abilities, I don't have my abilities and then it is still a struggle for me – it speaks for itself



# Healing and Trust

**“South Africa is my birthplace, but south Africa also rob me, and I only found that out when I came to Australia – the enormity of what apartheid did to us. That was quite striking, it’s still hurtful, it’s still a sore point, and I am still, it is a work in progress for me to get over it”.**

**So, South Africa really, I could say, you felt like you were an alien in your birthplace, and the word alien already tells you what that conjures up, that you don’t belong, and you were made to feel that you did not belong there, that’s what apartheid did”**

# Healing and Trust

- “So that sort of soften my heart a bit for the wit ous. There are good people as well you know. “
- “I think also psychologically you have issues having come out of the Apartheid era with the non trusting.  
CS: non trusting of ...?  
MV: the non trusting of a white person”

# Healing and trust

CS. What might be things that make it difficult for white and black South Africans to come together here [in Australia]?

That is not a difficult question -- it is a very easy question. I think what it is, for the white South African they have to see us as their equals and that they are not above us and that is very hard for them. It is hard for them to see us as equals even when they look at us, I feel as though they feel that their qualifications are better than us. They will also be better than us, and there mindset has to change. I think for non-white South Africans, as you can see I can't call myself black, we have to learn to trust, again, we also have to learn to perhaps look past who they are if we are going to trust them and accept them. But it is very, very hard, it is very challenging.

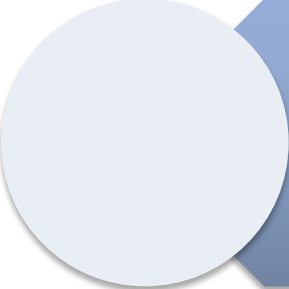
# Next stages



Innovative methodologies designed to foster the recovery of historical memory, of speaking unspoken stories, and for studying oppression, resistance, and peace building



Unspoken memories – deep wounding, absent spaces, informal healing



Explicating responses to oppression we also make visible dominance and privilege. For Apfelbaum (2001) it is vital to awaken a sense of injustice amongst the privileged and to theorise the listening positions under which the privileged will act against oppression.

# Next steps

- “The opportunities to connect the personal stories and narratives with other archival material, to publicly return the stories via poetry and performance, and to comprehend the ongoing effects of apartheid oppression on the lives of people, lie ahead as we construct new ways of being, knowing and doing and seek to enhance the catalytic, epistemic and political validity of the Apartheid Archive Project as a liberatory process and mechanism”. (Sonn, 2013; p. 235)

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