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*Building a Postcolonial Archive? Gender, Collective Memory and Citizenship in Post-apartheid South Africa**

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Since the ending of apartheid, the state, political parties, civil society and ordinary people in South Africa have attempted to deal with the traumatic legacies of the past to engender a common sense of nationhood. This paper examines this process of dealing with the past through the theoretical lens of post-colonialism, focusing, in particular, on attempts to establish historical truth and collective memory for black women, who have often been most marginalised by colonialism and apartheid and excluded from dominant accounts of history. It argues that if black women are denied a presence and agency in the construction of collective memory, their belonging and citizenship is consequently mediated in the process of nation building. It considers how exclusionary and discriminating patterns are reproduced through attempts to construct national memory-archives, focusing on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). It then explores the measures being taken to create a more inclusive process of restoring collective memory. In particular, it discusses the importance and possibilities of creating a postcolonial archive, where the voices and texts of historically marginalised people can be incorporated into national projects of remembering and notions of belonging. The paper focuses specifically on recent attempts to archive black women's pictorial and written testimony in a memory cloths programme. It concludes that representations of the past by women are a valuable tool in tracing the ways in which the legacy of their belonging and social standing shapes their contemporary citizenship. The radical potential of postcolonial archives lies in the fact that they can work against more sanitised representations of contemporary South Africa and towards the requirements for social justice (especially for black women) that are embodied within, but were arguably not met by, the TRC and broader nation building processes.

Introduction

Men make their own history but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted. The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living.¹

... [H]istory reflects the roles that men have played, women are often forgotten... If history is

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1 K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works: the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (Moscow, Progress Press, 1991), p. 95

to be fulfilled, and women's contribution to the struggle acknowledged, the democracy we are building must not leave them aside on the margins.²

Coming to terms with the past has emerged as the grand narrative of the late twentieth and early 21st centuries. Individuals and nations are seeking to overcome their traumatic legacies through the establishment of historical truth and the creation of collective memory.³ Since the ending of apartheid, the state, political parties, civil society and ordinary people in South Africa have attempted to deal with the traumatic legacies of the past, to provide some therapeutic release and to engender a common sense of nationhood, people and community. This paper examines this process of dealing with the past through the theoretical lens of post-colonialism focusing, in particular, on attempts to establish historical truth and collective memory for black⁴ women, who have often been most marginalised by colonialism and apartheid and excluded from dominant accounts of history. Marx and Engels refer to the constraints on the historical agency of men; this paper examines the even greater constraints on the historical agency of women and the possibilities of countervailing these. This is important because if they are denied a presence and agency in stories of national liberation, black women's belonging and citizenship in South Africa is compromised in the process of nation building.

The central concern of this paper is the need to create space for women within nation building processes in order that they are fully able to realize their citizenship. This relates to a broader set of issues about the gendered spaces of citizenship and its meanings in post-apartheid South Africa.⁵ The very notion of citizenship is contested at every level from its definition to its political application. At the lowest common denominator it refers to membership of a community (itself a contested concept) and the relationship between individuals and the state, to various aspects of collective national life, and between individuals within that community. It involves both rights and obligations.⁶ Feminists have argued that this is not simply voting rights, nor the right to call upon the state for certain forms of welfare provision, but active agency and the assertion of full autonomy within a community.⁷ Citizenship is more than a set of political rights granted by the state; it '... encompasses the economic, social, and political relationships between social groups and structures of power that mediate the standing of individuals in the polity'.⁸ This notion of citizenship extends beyond the individual to encompass ideas of civil society and incorporates both material and metaphorical spaces. This paper explores these issues by interrogating the intertwinings of the material spaces of national memory-archives and associated metaphorical spaces of belonging and identity in contemporary South Africa.

Women, and the consideration of gender, are often absent from dominant surveys of

2 Nozizwe Madlala, Human Rights Violation Hearing, Durban, 25/10/1996, <http://www.truth.org.za/special/women.htm>.

3 K. Christie, *The South African Truth Commission* (London, Macmillan 2000).

4 I use the term 'black' as inclusive of all women of colour, whilst being mindful of the sensitivities associated with such terminology, particularly in South Africa. See Z. Erasmus, 'Some Kind of White, Some Kind of Black: Living the Moments of Entanglement in South Africa and its Academy' in B. Hesse (ed). *Unsettled Multiculturalisms. Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions* (London, Zed, 2000), pp. 185–207 for a detailed discussion of such sensitivities.

5 See C. McEwan, 'Engendering Citizenship: Gendered Spaces of Democracy in South Africa', *Political Geography*, 19 5 (2000), pp. 627–651; 'Gender and Citizenship: Learning From South Africa' *Agenda*, 47 (2001), pp. 47–59; 'Gendered Citizenship in South Africa: Thinking Local and Global' in A. Gouws (ed). *Unthinking Citizenship. Feminist Debates in Contemporary South Africa* (London, Ashgate, in press).

6 R. Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (London, Macmillan 1997); U. Narayan, 'Towards a Feminist Vision of Citizenship: Rethinking the Implications of Dignity, Political Participation, and Nationality' in M.L. Shanley and U. Narayan (eds). *Reconstructing Political Theory* (Cambridge, Polity 1997), pp. 48–67.

7 B. Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market. Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East Central Europe* (Cheltenham, Elgar, 1993).

8 L. Staeheli, 'Restructuring Citizenship in Pueblo, Colorado', *Environment and Planning A*, 26 (1994), p. 850.

African history.⁹ Legal rights and public participation seem to guarantee women's political and civil citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa, but official national mythologies are deeply fractured by social practices and discourses. Pervasive sexism constantly undercuts women's equal rights and progressive legislation often seems far removed from the lived experiences of many women. It is important, therefore, to consider how exclusionary and discriminating patterns are reproduced through attempts to construct national memory-archives and what measures can be taken to create a more inclusive process of restoring collective memory. This requires a reconsideration of citizenship as a concept that is usually explained only in terms of legal and formal rights, since it also confers belonging and embeds the notion of recognising individuals' social standing and historical agency. Unlike legal rights, notions of belonging and social standing, which have been critical in South Africa's past and recent history and are recognised as central to post-apartheid nation building, are often blurred when shaped by gender.¹⁰ This is an important consideration in assessing attempts to construct non-exclusionary national archives that aim to document experiences of the past and in which all South Africans have access and agency.

The paper begins with a discussion of the importance and possibilities of creating a postcolonial archive, where the voices and texts of historically marginalised people can be incorporated into national projects of remembering and notions of belonging.¹¹ It then investigates popularised conceptions of women's belonging in the South African nation through various memory and archival projects. In particular, it explores attempts to build collective memory through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)¹² and the relative absence of the agency of black women in this process. It discusses some of the efforts to deal with these absences within the TRC, focusing specifically on recent attempts to archive black women's pictorial and written testimony in a memory cloths programme. The radical potential of representations of the past by black women is explored, suggesting that these representations are valuable in tracing the ways in which the legacy of women's belonging and social standing shapes their contemporary citizenship. It also explores the ways in which local-level or community-based archival projects might open up new spaces for the articulation of memory and archiving the present. It suggests that they can work against more sanitised representations of contemporary South Africa and towards the requirements for social justice (especially for black women) that are embodied within, but were arguably not met by, the TRC and broader nation building processes.

Postcolonial Archives and Nation Building in South Africa

At the heart of the attempts by the South African state to deal with its past is the political imperative to create archives that document this past and to allow the voices of the previously oppressed to be heard. As Christie argues, 'South Africa is a country where the

9 T. Zeleza, 'Gender Biases in African Historiography' in A. Imam, A. Mama, and F. Sow (eds). *Engendering African Social Sciences* (Senegal, CODESRIA Book Series 1996), pp. 81–115. See, however, M.J. Hay and S. Sticher, *African Women South of the Sahara* (2nd edn, London, Longman, 1995) and I. Berger and E.F. White, *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: Restoring Women to History* (Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1999).

10 D. Lewis, 'Gender Myths and Citizenship in Two Autobiographies by South African Women', *Agenda*, 40 (1999), pp. 38–44.

11 As in any context, what is meant by 'postcolonial' is open to question and this is nowhere more apparent than in South Africa (see D. Walder, *Post-Colonial Literatures* (Oxford, Blackwell 1998)). I use the term to refer to a conceptual and methodological approach to archives and nation building.

12 Of course, the TRC was about much more than building collective memory, but by embracing a dynamic notion of understanding the past in order to tackle the future the archives created lend themselves to postcolonial analysis. In particular, the question of whose pasts are remembered and whose are not and how this relates to contemporary understandings of belonging is apposite.

notion of 'fractured' memory is given new meaning. Memory is not fractured here; rather it is splintered, rent apart, torn into a multitude of pieces'.¹³ It is these shards of memories that the state is attempting to restore and put back together. To place the role of memory into historical context, there is reliable evidence that, in the weeks immediately preceding the inauguration of the first democratic government, in excess of four tons of highly incriminating records of Security Police operations were destroyed. In the absence of written records, the post-1994 state is attempting to construct an archived present based on witness and testimony. However, the fundamental question as to how to construct archives that create adequate space for the stories of ordinary people remains.

Archives are not merely receptacles of the past; concepts of history themselves are shaped by archives.¹⁴ The relationship between power and knowledge is crystallised within the material and metaphorical spaces of archives;¹⁵ the question of who has the power to make, record and interpret history is an important one in contemporary South Africa and one that informs current attempts to build collective memory. Foucault's notion of archives as not merely the material spaces of the repositories that are the archive, but more abstractly the 'law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events'¹⁶ is useful in the context of South Africa. It points to the ways in which stories of the past are always positioned within power relations and how archives themselves determine history. However, who the makers of those 'laws of what can be said' might be and how they come to exercise this power remain elusive in Foucault's critique. Derrida writes that it is the *archons* that have the power to interpret the archive: '... it is at their home, in that place which is their house [*arkheion*] ... , that official documents are filed'.¹⁷ Unlike Foucault's archive, Derrida's involves actual *archons*, creators and guardians of the archive who 'exercise social order not discursively but hermeneutically through the interpretation of texts'.¹⁸ This is an important consideration for reflecting critically on the creation of national archives in South Africa. As this paper demonstrates, there is a recognition, both at state-level and by historians, artists and community activists, of the significance of archival violence; consequently, attempts are being made, through truth-telling and memory projects, to democratise the archive-building process and counter-act the archival violence of the past. The South African state and civil society organisations are attempting to build post-apartheid archives that could be described, in theoretical terms, as postcolonial. The concerns of postcolonial theorists with displacing and deconstructing archives, to reveal absences and agencies in historical records and to critique the power of those who assemble and interpret archives, have particular resonance with attempts in South Africa to construct more inclusive memory-archives.

The importance of documenting the lives of black South Africans gained political momentum with the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s under the leadership of Steve Biko. As Ramphele recounts, Biko had identified this as vital to encouraging them to become agents of their own liberation: 'One had to write history to make history'.¹⁹ Documentation and research amongst blacks were under-developed for a

13 Christie, *The South African Truth Commission*, p. 8.

14 J. Derrida, *Archive Fever* (trans. E. Prenowitz) (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996).

15 J. Schwartz and T. Cook, 'Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory' *Archival Science* (forthcoming).

16 M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (trans. A. Sheridan Smith) (New York, Pantheon, 1972), p. 129.

17 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 10.

18 S. Shetty and E. Bellamy, 'Postcolonialism's Archive Fever', *Diacritics*, 30, 1 (2000), p. 27. Inspired by Derrida, Harris has shown how this power operated under the apartheid regime in South Africa and how this might be different under post-apartheid conditions; V. Harris, 'Redefining Archives in South Africa: Public Archives and Society in Transition, 1990–1996', *Archivaria* 42 (Autumn 1996), pp. 1–27.

19 M. Ramphele, *A Life* (second edition) (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996), p. 67.

variety of reasons and, as with many oppressed or marginalised peoples, their histories very often went unrecorded.²⁰ Gramsci argues that there is no 'history of the subaltern classes' because a lack of class-consciousness means 'it never occurs to them that their history might have some possible importance, that there might be some value in leaving documentary evidence of it'.²¹ In contrast, Derrida ascribes a lack of subaltern historical agency to archives themselves and the interpretative power of those who create them.²² Both contentions are helpful in considering the past erasure of documentation of the lives of black South Africans. However, the specificities of the South African context demand a more detailed interpretation. The oral tradition did not lay a firm foundation for the importance of the written word, and the deliberate under-development of blacks by means of Bantu Education discouraged the emergence of written expression and recording. Moreover, 'the instability of the life of the poor and marginal, subject to forced removals and the vicissitudes of inadequate shelter, led to the loss of many important historical and other documents'.²³ The scarcity of black researchers and social scientists made black South Africans vulnerable to becoming the objects of other people's studies, with all the risks of limited insight inherent in that form of scholarship. As Ramphele argues, the annual reports of the Institute of Race Relations in the 1960s and early 1970s were a case in point. They were chronicles of the victimisation of blacks at the hands of the apartheid regime, but black people were denied any active role in the chronicle. 'Nothing positive about what blacks did was reported with any prominence. It was as if such positive reporting would reduce the impact of the reports on the oppression blacks suffered. Blacks were depicted as the ultimate victims, completely lacking in agency'.²⁴ Thus, as Christie argues, 'The way that collective memory is stored... is not simply a technical formulation but one that bears directly on the *legitimation* of power relations and what that means. The question of control [of the archives] is a crucial political issue'.²⁵ Images of the past commonly legitimate the present social order through shared memory. Memory is material – it serves a purpose, and this is of considerable significance in contemporary South Africa.

The fundamental issue for archiving the present in South Africa is ensuring that those previously denied agency, including black South African women, play a full part in the documenting of their lives, in constructing what might be termed a postcolonial archive. Spivak has questioned whether there can be such a thing as a postcolonial archive in her consideration of the silencing of women in historical narratives.²⁶ The construction and interpretation of archives is gendered in specific ways, with the result that the agency of marginalized or subaltern women is erased from the historical record. Locating lost texts, be they oral histories, pictorial memories or written documents is a particular imperative in the construction of a postcolonial archive. As Shetty and Bellamy argue, these are significant for 'understanding the "palimpsestic narrative of imperialism" and its particular *texturing* of the ethnocentric complicity between writing and the formation of a "civil" society'.²⁷ It is important, therefore, to explore the role of gender in the construction of

20 Although, see C. Saunders (ed). *Reminiscences of Kafir Life and History: and Other Papers* (2nd edn, Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1977); (ed). *Black Leaders in Southern African History* (London, Heinemann, 1979).

21 A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (ed. and trans. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith) (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

22 Derrida, *Archive Fever*.

23 Ramphele, *A Life*, p. 67.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

25 Christie, *The South African Truth Commission*, p. 6.

26 G. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds). *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

27 Shetty and Bellamy, 'Postcolonialism's Archive Fever', p. 30.

memory-archives in South Africa, if and how marginalised women continue to be silenced, even in attempts to create inclusive archives of the present and stories of the past, and the implications of this for the construction of belonging, social standing and citizenship. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, it is important to ask to what extent is the agency of black women included in truth-telling and memory projects, and can complete stories ever be told based on partial records?

Subaltern Voices and the Partiality of Truth

South Africa, like other post-colonial states, is engaged not only in the process of nation building but also in attempting to give representation to the traumatic past experiences of ordinary citizens as part of this process. As Asmal *et al.* argue:

In moving away from the discredited governing consciousness of the past, we will need to build a new, shared and ceaselessly debated memory of that past. Without sustained remembrance and debate, it will be difficult to develop a new South African culture with its various strands intertwined in constructive friction, rather than in mere conflict and mutual strangulation. This talk of shared memory must not be misunderstood or mystified. It is not the creation of a post apartheid *volk* or a stifling homogeneous nationhood; nor of a new fatherland. Nor is it merely the equivalent of every individual's mental ability to retain facts and arguments at the front of her consciousness. Such analogies between individual and collective memory are unhelpful. Rather, shared memory, in the intended sense, is a process of historical accountability.²⁸

The TRC is part of a particular model being deployed in the management of memory in the public sphere, which affects the way in which citizens are allowed or refused access to critical moments of 'parole publique'.²⁹ This is based around a duty of memory within the sphere of public deliberation. Here, amnesty opposes amnesia as a duty placed on perpetrators to engage, by way of public rituals of narration, in a non-criminal judicial process of 'full disclosure'. As Cassin argues, this is a rather different model to that in use in most other contemporary democracies in the management of sensitive archives (he compares the French laws regulating the access to files regarding the Second World War).³⁰ The South African full disclosure on a quasi civil war, with its duty of narration, is a model of *politically active* memory, while the French memory-archive regarding collaboration relies entirely on a written treatment of documents that aims to *de-politicise* memory. The South African model carries implications for what is considered 'parole publique' in a democracy and how private citizens, not experts, can engage the public past in order to make informed choices regarding the common good. In this sense, the TRC is a radical model in providing for politically active collective memory. It is, however, not without its critics.

Ignatieff comments that truth commissions can only 'reduce the number of lies that can be circulated unchallenged in public discourse'.³¹ However, those involved in commissions and associated memory projects have insisted that, 'truth-telling provides opportunities to heal, restore human dignity, demonstrate censure for horrific acts, encourage democracy, and promote reconciliation'.³² One of the strengths of the TRC is the broad definition of

28 K. Asmal, L. Asmal and R. S. Roberts, *Reconciliation Through Truth: A Reckoning of Apartheid Criminal Governance* (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1996), pp. 9–10.

29 B. Cassin, 'The Politics of Memory: On Treatments of Hate', *Javnost*, 8, 3 (2001), pp. 9–21.

30 *Ibid.*

31 M. Ignatieff, 'Overview: Articles of Faith', *Index on Censorship*, 5 (1996), p. 113.

32 E. Stanley, 'Evaluating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 39, 3 (2001), p. 528.

truth used to construct a national archive,³³ and the attempts to expose hidden stories and create a new truth that is made and owned *by* the people not *for* the people. Despite this, the biggest single criticism of the TRC has perhaps come from feminists and women activists who have challenged the continued erasure of black women's accounts of their lives under apartheid. As Graybill points out,

Given the support for women's rights in the new government, it came as a surprise to many observers that when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission began hearings in 1996 to look into human rights violations committed during the Apartheid era, women's voices were not being heard, and the nation was getting a skewed look at the nature of human rights violations that had been committed.³⁴

When women did testify, they spoke largely about abuses to male relatives (sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers). As Goldblatt and Meintjies argue, 'Our society constantly diminishes women's role and women themselves then see their experiences as unimportant.'³⁵ In addition, the media and the Commission portrayed women as 'secondary victims'.³⁶ Women were located in the private realm as supporters of those in the vanguard of the liberation struggle and not in the public realm as resisters of apartheid. The TRC came under pressure from women's organisations and held at least one hearing in each region dedicated to women and their *own* experiences of detention, torture and loss. Women were allowed to tell stories on behalf of other women; groups of women came together to tell stories as a collective and hearings were held in camera before female Commissioners. Three women-only hearings were held (in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg)³⁷; unfortunately, none took place in the Eastern Cape, recognised as the site of most human rights violations. Media coverage was negligible, probably because, as Goldblatt and Meintjies argue, violence against women in South Africa is so commonplace as not to be sensational.³⁸ There were also profound cultural and other pressures placed on women that deterred them from testifying. These include discourses of shame, collusion and complicity that prevent women from discussing in public the sexual violence that is privately acknowledged to have been widespread, pressures not to discredit the liberation movement by revealing abuses committed by comrades in their own organisations, and even direct pressure from government ministers not to disclose stories of sexual assault.³⁹

The TRC was mandated only to recompense victims of *gross* human rights abuses,

33 The Final Report defined four distinct notions of truth: (1) factual or forensic truth based in legal and scientific notions of impartiality and objective procedures; (2) personal or narrative truth, based on subjective stories and multilayered sets of experiences; (3) social or dialogue truth, constructed through debate and collective discussion of facts; (4) healing and restorative truth that places facts in context and acknowledges individual experiences. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* (Oxford, Macmillan Reference, 1998), 1, 5, pp. 29–45.

34 L. Graybill, 'The Contribution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Toward the Promotion of Women's Rights in South Africa', *Women's Studies International Forum* 24, 1 (2001), p. 1.

35 B. Goldblatt and S. Meintjies, *Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Submission to the TRC, <http://www.truth.org.za/submit/gender/htm> (1996).

36 Graybill, 'The Contribution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Toward the Promotion of women's rights in South Africa', p. 4.

37 These testimonies, some of which relate harrowing accounts of physical and sexual violence and torture perpetrated both by Security Police and comrades in the liberation struggle, can be found at <http://www.truth.org.za/special/women.htm>.

38 B. Goldblatt and S. Meintjies, 'Dealing with the Aftermath: Sexual Violence and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Agenda*, 36 (1998), pp. 7–17. See also B. Goldblatt and S. Meintjies, 'South African Women Demand the Truth' in M. Turshen and C. Twagiramariya, *What Women Do in Wartime* (London, Zed, 1998), pp. 27–61 and D. Epstein and E. Unterhalter 'Gendering Education for Reconciliation: "Femininity", Memory and Silence in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report', paper presented at Second International Gender and Education Conference, University of Warwick (April 1999).

39 Graybill, 'The Contribution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Toward the Promotion of Women's Rights in South Africa', pp. 5–6; see also A. Krog, *Country of My Skull* (London, Jonathon Cape, 1998).

defined as the 'killing, abduction, torture, or severe ill treatment' of any person by a person acting with a political motive.⁴⁰ Consequently, an understanding of apartheid based on illustrating that women's rights were violated as a matter of course was not deeply examined by the Commission. This has raised questions about the gendered truthfulness of the apartheid history told through the TRC Report. As Stanley argues, 'With women's stories being negated and normalised, the patriarchal state that has sustained inequality, powerlessness and the escalating "continuum of violence" against women will not be broken'.⁴¹ The TRC produced only a partial truth because of the absence of women's testimony, especially relating to everyday violence. One of the most serious legacies of apartheid is poverty, whose main victims are women.⁴² The TRC focused on the most extreme abuses and events but virtually ignored the countless horrors that people, and especially black women, faced in their daily struggle to survive. The TRC has also been criticised for not dealing with structural social injustice and bringing about social transformation.⁴³ Truth telling has historical, political and healing significance, but some truths, such as those from women, were underrepresented in the collection process and thus remain underrepresented in the national memory-archive.

Despite the failings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it must be acknowledged that it is but one attempt by the South African state to establish the historical truth and create collective memory, to restore the fractured memories of apartheid and engender a common sense of nationhood. It has received much critical attention⁴⁴ and will doubtless receive more since its work is still an unfolding process, but it is only one mechanism in the transformation in South Africa. Other bodies and actors are also playing a role and should be considered as part of the broader truth and reconciliation process. State-level initiatives like the TRC reveal the partiality of truth; it is perhaps at the local level where cultural change is more observable and where memory projects can have their most radical and transformative effects. The post-apartheid period has witnessed the testimony of previously silenced voices in many different localised memory projects. These include radical oral history projects,⁴⁵ autobiographical accounts by women and life histories of communities lost or destroyed under the apartheid 'removals',⁴⁶ and radical art projects.⁴⁷ Revisionary social histories⁴⁸, revised museum displays (including the removal of the 'Bushman' exhibit at the South African Museum in Cape Town) and the mainstreaming of interest in previously marginalised figures (for example, 'Hottentots', 'Bushmen', Cape

40 The *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* (1995), cited in Graybill, 'The Contribution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Toward the Promotion of Women's Rights in South Africa', p. 4.

41 Stanley, 'Evaluating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission', p. 540.

42 Human Rights Watch, *Violence Against Women in South Africa: State Response to Domestic Violence and Rape* (New York, Human Rights Watch, 1995).

43 B. Hamber, *Past Imperfect: Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland and Societies in Transition* (Derry, Incore, 1998).

44 See, for example, R. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001).

45 See C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894–1985* (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1996); Z. Erasmus, 'Recognition Through Pleasure, Recognition Through Violence: Gendered Coloured Subjectivities in South Africa', *Current Sociology*, 48, 3 (2000), pp. 71–85; S. Field, 'Remembering Experience, Interpreting Memory: Life Stories from Windermere', *African Studies*, 60, 1 (2001), pp. 119–133.

46 See, for example, K. Daniels, 'Life in Claremont. An Interview with May Santon', *African Studies*, 60, 1 (2001), pp. 39–64; N. Ngcelwane, *Sala Kahle, District Six. An African Woman's Perspective* (Cape Town, Kwela Books 1998).

47 A. Coombes, 'L'objet de la Traduction: Notes sur 'L'art' et L'autonomie dans un Contexte Post-colonial', *Cahiers D'Etudes Africaines*, 39 (1999), pp. 155–156, 635–658.

48 See, for example, U. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 'Dispossession and Memory: the Black River Community of Cape Town', *Oral History* (Autumn 2000), pp. 35–43; N. Worden, E. Van Heyningen and V. Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social History* (London, Human Rights Watch, 2000).

Malays and slaves) are reflective of the more radical attempts at constructing memory-archives. They are also not unrelated to the upsurge of new (sub-)nationalisms, such as Coloured and Griqua identities.⁴⁹

Social historians see themselves as facilitators of the emergence of submerged memories through the generation of oral testimony and remembrance and have seen their work as an attempt to give voice to the experience of previously marginal groups and to recover the agency of ordinary people.⁵⁰ The documentation of these pasts, conceived as 'hidden history', seeks to democratise the historical record, create an archive for the future and an alternative form of historical documentation. They raise questions about the chronologies, periodisations and narratives of South African social histories, the 'domination versus resistance' model they have employed and the practices and processes of the authoring and translation of memory through oral text into 'history'. They also raise the importance of the translation of personal memory into collective memory. As Keegan argues, 'in the narratives of ordinary people's lives we begin to see some of the major forces of history at work, large social forces that are arguably the real key to understanding the past'.⁵¹ Here, the concept of memory represents more than individual experience and stands for collective social and economic experience, particularly as this relates to class. As Minkley and Rasool argue, in the 1980s national and class teleologies were collapsed into the notion of 'the people'. 'History from below' was 'people's history' and was connected with 'people's power' and 'people's education'. Oral history was seen as radical. Although more recently this has been problematised (for example, apartheid did not always produce resistance and resistance was not always occasioned by apartheid⁵²), these localised re-representations of the past are of fundamental importance in producing unsanitised versions of history that allow previously marginalised groups, especially black women, agency in their own representation. As the following case study demonstrates, memory-archive projects have the potential to empower women in communities, both in terms of their claiming historical agency and helping them improve the material conditions of their lives; they also point towards the possibilities of creating a postcolonial archive.

Empowerment through Memory: a Case Study of the *Amazwi Abesifazane* Memory Cloths Programme

The *Amazwi Abesifazane*⁵³ memory cloths programme is part of the community rehabilitation programmes, which are aimed at promoting the healing and recovery of individuals and communities that have been affected by human rights violations, under the broader aims of the TRC. Although not directly linked to the TRC, the project claims this as its inspiration and source of influence.⁵⁴ It is a unique project, initiated by sculptor Andries Botha, to provide black South African women from rural and urban areas with a vehicle to articulate traumatic experiences of the apartheid era, and to preserve and promote their

49 S. Cornelissen and S. Horstmeier, 'The Social and Political Construction of Identities in the New South Africa: An Analysis of the Western Cape Province', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40, 1 (2002), pp. 55–82.

50 G. Minkley and C. Rasool, 'Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa' in S. Nuttall and C. Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 89–99.

51 T. Keegan, *Facing the Storm: Portraits of Black Lives in Rural South Africa* (Cape Town, David Phillip, 1998), p. 168.

52 Minkley and Rasool, 'Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa', pp. 91–2.

53 This translates from isiZulu as Voices of Women. The discussion here is drawn from information garnered through interviews with members of *Amazwi Abesifazane* at Durban Art Gallery (23 and 24 June 2001) and from the organisation's website at <http://www.voices.org.za>.

54 <http://www.voices.org.za/history.html>.

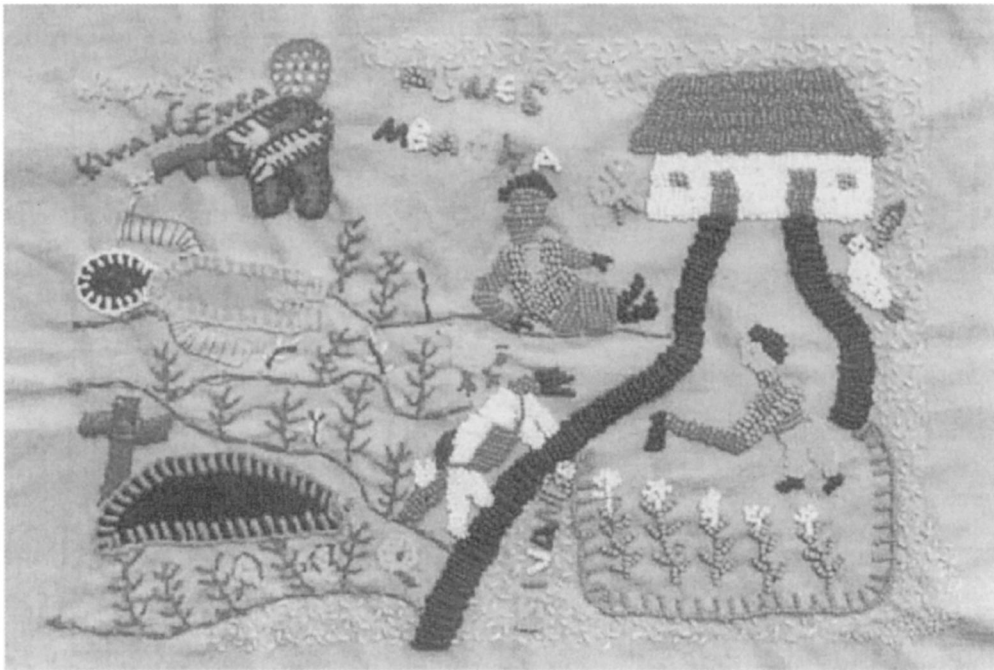


Figure 1. An example of a memory cloth: #41 by Ntombi Agnes Mbatha. The accompanying text reads ‘In 1992 my husband and I were going into town. Our son of 20 asked us to buy him some shoes. We bought him the shoes, but when we returned home our son was not there and then we heard he had been gunned down. We were so sad ...’

creativity and memories. Women from urban and rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal who had experienced the trauma of the apartheid era were asked to create a pictorial and verbal record of their experiences. The project was initially set up through women’s organisations and other interested parties who facilitated workshops. A significant part of the workshop process was given to the importance of memory retrieval. Specific women from the various areas were identified as project leaders and co-ordinators.

Painful memories are transformed into creativity by embroidery, appliqué and beadwork, drawing on indigenous arts and crafts, as well as Euro-American traditional sources, such as samplers and quilts. The use of beads is particularly significant because in South Africa (and especially in Ndebele and Zulu cultures) they are not merely for adornment but play a part in cultural rites (courtship, marriage, homage to ancestors) and modes of communication (status symbols, love-letters). The inclusion of beadwork within a formal archive is part of a growing recognition of the place of ancient traditions and customs within contemporary nationhood.⁵⁵ Sewing is also significant since, in many cultures and historical contexts, it has been used to communicate when, for various political and sociological reasons, oral disclosure has not been possible (this is discussed subsequently).⁵⁶

55 There is a rich social history context for beadwork and the diverse material cultures of South Africa. The ways in which these traditional skills are becoming part of an economic enterprise for poor people merits further interrogation. Space restricts the discussion of either here, but see S. Morrow and N. Vokwana “‘Shaping in Dull, Dead Earth Their Dreams of Riches and Beauty’: Clay Modelling at e-Hala and Hogsback in the Eastern Cape, South Africa”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27 1 (2001), pp. 137–161 for an excellent discussion of Xhosa male clay modelling. The latter is suggestive of rich interrogations of ‘beguiling objects’ like memory cloths framed within their historical processes and current social and economic milieu.

56 See the discussion of the secret messages and symbols stitched into Red Cross quilts by British women POWs in Japanese camps during the Second World War in B. Archer, ‘A Patchwork of Internment’, *History Today* (July 1997), 11–18.

A national archive of 1000 memory cloths is being assembled to form a collective memory of life in South Africa up to the present day. Each cloth is an original work, to which is attached a profile of the artist and her story, written in her first language as well as English (see Figure 1). According to Botha:

Through the creation of memory cloths, we are drawing on the collective experience of women who have known loss. Through the process of creation they will hopefully reach some level of catharsis through which they can grow both spiritually, emotionally and financially. This is a necessary, albeit humble, attempt to begin to transform the oral archive into a more formal record of South African history.⁵⁷

Although primarily aimed at memory retrieval, the project is dedicated to improving the lives of women by encouraging peer support, nurturing dialogue within communities and developing women's self-employment industry that creates products to market internationally.

Amazwi Abesifazane is part of Create Africa South, a non-profit, non-governmental organisation established in 2000 in response to the diminishing funding base for arts and culture to promote and develop creativity in South Africa, particularly within historically disadvantaged communities.⁵⁸ Principal funding is provided by the Prins Claus Fund in the Netherlands and working partners include African Art Centres in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, the Association for Women's Empowerment in Esikhawini, the Documentation Centre in Durban and the Self-Employed Women's Union. Creating a trust fund under the auspices of Create Africa South, but administered and contributed to by the participating women, is also an aim of the project. This was launched at an exhibition of memory cloths held at Durban Art Gallery in June and July 2001, where as many cloths as possible were exhibited in an educational environment. The educational focus is on the process of memory retrieval, loss, women's issues (especially gender violence), the role of catharsis in healing a nation, and the role of women in communities. Once the national archive is completed, the intention is to sell the entire archive. The proceeds of the sale will form the first major donation to the trust fund. In addition to this, each memory cloth sold commercially through a networking system, which has also included exhibits at art galleries and museums, will also contribute to the trust. The purpose of the trust is to promote similar self-empowerment projects, within communities and especially for individual mothers experiencing difficulty in educating their children, enabling women to develop their own creative, economic initiatives that will lead to personal autonomy.

The first cloth made by each woman forms part of the 1000 cloths being collected for the national archive. At present, the programme is based in KwaZulu-Natal but it is hoped that it will be extended into other provinces. The women were invited to contribute a single memory that they felt was important to the project, and the nature of these memories is significant in documenting women's experiences of both apartheid and the transition to democracy. Perhaps not surprisingly, many cloths reveal relatively recent memories of violence in KwaZulu-Natal. Between the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the first democratic election in 1994, the National Party used its command of the state machinery in a merciless fashion to fuel effectively a civil war in the province. As Asmal argues:

Hit squads intensified, attacks on innocent commuters were carried out by the Civil Cooperation Bureau (an Orwellian name for the state security body) and, in the killing fields of Natal, the regime funded and fuelled a civil war which it presented to the world as

⁵⁷ Cited in Anon., 'Healing the Heart with Art', *Daily News* (Durban) (Tuesday 29 May 2001), p. 7.

⁵⁸ <http://www.cas.org.za>. The President is Andries Botha; Mazisi Kunene, one of Africa's senior poets, is Vice President.

'black-on-black' violence. As many people were lost to political violence between 1990 and 1994 as were killed during the entire previous history of apartheid, dating back to 1948.⁵⁹

The TRC hearings ultimately failed to force an acknowledgement of the central role that the state machinery played in the violence between rival ANC and IFP factions. However, the memory cloths project is ensuring that the voices of those whose lives have been irrevocably scarred by the violence are embodied within the national archive. It is not surprising given the level of violence in KwaZulu-Natal that memories of this time are represented frequently in the cloths. The bewilderment and trauma of these events are encapsulated in the written accounts that accompany the pictorial representations:

The day I will never forget is when there was violence between two organisations, Inkatha and the ANC in 1985. On June 16 people were ransacking the shops... It was an extremely agonising experience for me when they took my cousin Khayini and put a tyre round his neck.⁶⁰

As a result of friction between two political organisations violence erupted on 25th December 1995. This happened on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, at Shobashobane. A certain kraal was attacked by gunmen and the head killed... The bodies of the deceased were doused with petrol and set alight. The house was also burned and the children left destitute.⁶¹

What a life of unhappiness we lived in 1990, seeing children being shot and necklaced.⁶²

At Mkhomazi, in the area of Zembane, two political organisations, the ANC and IFP were fighting. It was on a Sunday morning when IFP members attacked us. They shot and killed my four brothers... We fled the area and took a taxi to seek refuge at KwaMashu K section where we now live. We then decided to go to Durban to start selling fruit in Victoria Street trying to fend for the orphaned children.⁶³

Violence broke out in 1991 between IFP and the ANC at KwaMaphumulo. Many people died there including my uncle... He left behind his wife Mama Ndlovu and two children... MaNdlovu gets money by ploughing mealies fields for other women in the area and fetching water from the river for them. It's sad that a woman suffers this much just because of politics.⁶⁴

These lived experiences of violence and trauma within families and the dislocation that often resulted were largely absent at the TRC hearings.

Unlike the grand narratives of histories of apartheid, the memory cloths also reveal that everyday survival struggles and violence against women within communities are often foremost in the memories of black women. Many of the cloths relate less directly to the injustices of apartheid (although several record the traumas of families being dispossessed of land) but to the daily struggles for survival within communities. In particular, natural disasters and their impacts are recounted. For example, Celani Nojiyeza's cloth records one of her most vivid memories: 'In 1982, the sun was so hot that it burnt all my mealies and there was no food for my family. At that time, I was dependent on the food I grew to feed my family, so it was a disaster.'⁶⁵ Similarly, Phille Mabaso describes the after-effects of the 1987 floods in Pietermaritzburg:

People who suffered most after the rains were the women who had to look after the orphaned children... Women had to shoulder the responsibility of dealing with property damaged by water, falling trees, stones, at the same time giving love to their children ...⁶⁶

59 K. Asmal, 'Truth, Reconciliation and Justice the South African Experience in Perspective', *The Modern Law Review*, 63, 1 (2000), pp. 9–10.

60 *Amazwi Abesifazane* Memory Cloths Exhibition, Durban Art Gallery, June 2001: Sindisiwe Hlongwane, #266.

61 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Christobel Ngcobo, #295.

62 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: S'bongile Makhanya, #133.

63 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Zendile Nzama, #222.

64 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Mavis Ngcobo, #657.

65 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Celani Nojiyeza, #424.

66 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Phille Mabaso, #824.

Significantly, nearly all the cloths feature homes, reinforcing the significance of women's roles in domestic and community life. The loss of homes is also a persistent theme within the project, both as a consequence of apartheid and of factional violence during the late 1980s and 1990s. For example, one woman describes the effect of her family being evicted from their land by white farmers in 1970: 'Even today I still have a loathsome feeling for white farmers for the inhumane treatment they inflicted on my family.'⁶⁷ Another woman describes her memory cloth as follows:

This is the incident that took place at Mkhomazi, in the area of Qiko on the 20th September 1987... when a faction fight... broke out between the Matshobho and Mkhono factions. I lived with the Mkhono faction. People from Matshobho faction came and shot my uncle... in the chest and he died instantly. I, together with my children... fled the area. We took a taxi and went to Durban. We now live in KwaMashu township.⁶⁸

Men's violence against women is also common theme:

It was on Friday of November 1987 when my grandmother MaMhlongo, told me that I, together with my children, were going to be killed on that night... The reason for us to be killed was to punish my husband ... , as a retribution for the alleged killing of my elder uncle in law... We left our home never to return. I was very disturbed because I left behind our livestock, furniture and all the clothes except for what I carried in a small bag.⁶⁹

My mother was building a house. They had been paying the builder all the way through the building of it and when the house was finished the builder demanded more money. The money was now finished and an argument ensued. The builder became very angry and shot my mother dead.⁷⁰

Perhaps the most poignant story of the violence perpetrated against women is that of Nonhlanhla Hnyandu, who was killed just two months before the opening of the Durban installation in April 2001. She had created a memory cloth for the *Amazwi Abesifazane* archive in the first workshop held at Richmond Farm/Ntuzume B. She also co-ordinated a later workshop at Phindangane in Richmond Farm and was seeking to raise money to educate her children. A simple memorial in the installation at Durban Art Gallery explained the circumstances of her death: 'Nonhlanhla was a victim of domestic violence. Her boyfriend stabbed her to death with a screwdriver in front of her three children.'

Despite the cultural silences around sexual violence, several women use the memory cloths to relate their experiences. One woman recounts:

I will never forget the day I was raped by a stranger... I was so angry and depressed because he had taken away what I had treasured most – my virginity... When women's organisations were formed, we hoped the incidences of rape will be little, but it's not getting better, instead it's worse than before.⁷¹

Unsurprisingly, the violence and devastation associated with HIV-AIDS, which is widespread in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, is also a prominent theme of the exhibition. For example, Makhosi Khanyil tells the story of Gugu Dlamini, aged 22, who was open about her HIV-positive status, even going on TV to discuss her illness. 'One day as she was coming from Durban, and soon after alighting from the train at KwaMashu station, she was stoned and stabbed to death. Nobody came to her rescue because she was HIV +',⁷² The

67 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Tuleleni Tenza, #216.

68 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Nokuthala Khomo, #207.

69 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Sibongile Myeza, #211.

70 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Pumazile Khubisa, #356.

71 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Mathombi Nxumalo, #828.

72 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Makhosi Khanyil, #798.

memory cloth illustrates her bloody murder. Other testimonies reveal the violence and ostracism faced by women with HIV/AIDS:

On June 12, 1995, my uncle Zolani found out that he was HIV + ... My uncle decided to blame his wife Nandipha even though he was sleeping with several women. He came home drunk one day, and with his friend Vukan, he took his wife to the bush where they stoned her until they thought she was dead. Nandipha somehow managed to stagger to a nearby house... She died on the way to hospital.⁷³

Nonzuzo Gumede was my best friend who lived at Richmond Farm. In 1997 she died of AIDS. She was 19 years old. She had nobody to take care of her during the day because her mother was at work. Her mother asked me to help my friend. Nonzuzo was so weak that she slept all day and was unable to do anything. I used to wash her, spoon-fed her and change her clothes as well as her linen.⁷⁴

The text accompanying another cloth states simply: 'The whole family died of AIDS'.⁷⁵

Although the vast majority of cloths relate memories of dispossession, loss, trauma, violence and death, several also record happier memories about everyday rural and community life. Others celebrate the ending of apartheid and the promise of happier times. For example, Margaret Thakane Lesoma produced a cloth entitled 'Chains are Broken'. Her testimony states:

Previously we were denied our rights but today all that has changed. The time has come for us to enjoy, discover and explore the true meaning of so-called life. The day has come when all prison doors open and we are free from prison chains. Freedom! Freedom! How long we've been waiting for you.⁷⁶

Other cloths celebrate the strength of women. For example, Busi Mlotshwa's cloth, entitled 'Portrait of a Zulu Woman', is accompanied by the following testimony:

She has that inner beauty that only those close to her can see and appreciate. Those lips may not have a smile, but they have put smiles in many faces. She has acquired wisdom in all that she has witnessed through those bold beautiful eyes. Her family is always surrounded with her warmth, security and understanding. She is determined, full of life.⁷⁷

Through its enabling of the voices of marginalised women, its restoration of their historical agency to the national memory-archive, and its emphasis on catharsis, economic empowerment and social transformation, *Amazwi Abesifazane* is playing a small but significant role in continuing the truth and reconciliation process, both at the local level and in terms of the national archive. The reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa and the development of a viable democracy needs to acknowledge the central role that women play in consolidating the building of nation, homes and communities. Memory cloths are a powerful way of acknowledging the agency of ordinary women. *Amazwi Abesifazane* pays tribute to the sacrifices made by women that made democracy possible and records lived experiences of daily struggle both in the past and in the present. Its radical potential lies in the fact that it can be used to counter the erasure of women's historical agency in addition to the erasure from dominant discourses of the polarising effects of neo-liberalism and the devastation of HIV/AIDS. It draws on the rich historical tradition of crafted creativity as a means of intimate communication. The intimate disclosure of traumatic experience, which proved impossible for women through the TRC hearings, sets up a necessary catharsis that enables women to speak publicly about their experiences and

73 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Buselani Nene, #838.

74 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Zama Zulu, #842.

75 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Thembisile Shozi, #357.

76 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Margaret Thakane Lesoma, #25.

77 *Amazwi Abesifazane*: Busi Mlotshwa, #315.

acknowledges the importance of memory as part of the oral archive of South Africa. The sensibility of the act of intrinsic disclosure is significantly influenced by the abstract encoded language evidenced in indigenous beaded craft techniques of African women. The project, therefore, is an attempt to engage an oral archive that remains undisclosed for the same reasons that the TRC remained largely silent on gender violence. It is clearly given impetus by the post-apartheid legislative exercise of reconstruction and memory as a mechanism of reconciliation, but also by the need to countervail the gender processes that continue to erase the voices and agency of previously marginalized women from national memory-archives.

Reflecting on Radical Memory Projects

The memory cloths programme is one of several examples of archival projects in South Africa and complementary or alternative strategies to the truth and reconciliation process, including religious and non-governmental organisations that are actively involved in creating, documenting, and preserving collective memories at the local level. One example is the Ministries of the Christian Development Agency for Social Action, whose publications have carried accounts of past abuses and the personal experiences of the victims. The organisation has also provided material support to those who suffered. Homes that were destroyed by politically motivated violence have been rebuilt, and relief supplies and facilities such as safe water have been provided to the victims of forced removals and those of post-apartheid political violence.⁷⁸ Another example of how collective memory is created, documented and preserved is the *khulumani* (speak out) groups. These are groups of the victims and/or relatives of victims and sympathisers who meet regularly to discuss their experiences. They also map out strategies to follow in engaging the government in detailed consultations on issues of justice, reparation and physical protection, and provide emotional support to members in the process of reconciliation.⁷⁹ The Direct Action Centre for Peace and Memory in Cape Town is an initiative set up by veterans of the liberation struggle. It conducts tours of the townships in order to tell alternative and previously hidden stories about apartheid violence. It also uses some of the proceeds in a Mothers Support Initiative to improve the material conditions of mothers who lost sons in the struggle.

Radical memory projects such as these, rooted in both the discursive and material empowerment of previously oppressed peoples, are even more important when the pressures by vested interest groups to produce what Lewis calls 'sanitised' versions of history are considered.⁸⁰ Lewis argues that contemporary representations of South Africa and the apartheid past are very often sanitised (primarily by the business community) for international consumption and in this sense cultural change has not occurred. He discusses, for example, the renewed confidence in the significance of sport, expenditure of money and organised leisure, the recycling of old images of wild animals and exotic landscapes, and the transforming of unacceptable racial exclusivity into acceptable class exclusivity. In contrast, cultural workers such as policy-makers, historians, teachers, writers and artists see the local processes of remaking and re-presenting South Africa as 'ongoing projects of considerable urgency, complexity, and precariousness, projects in which the often uncom-

78 W. Chirwa, 'Collective Memory and the Process of Reconciliation and Reconstruction', *Development in Practice*, 7, 4 (1997), pp. 479–82.

79 See the discussion of the *khulumani* theatre project in D. Walder, 'The Necessity of Error: Memory and Representation in the New Literatures' in S. Nasta (ed.), *Reading the 'New' Literatures in a Postcolonial Era* (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 149–170.

80 S. Lewis, 'Sanitising South Africa', *Soundings*, 16 (2000), p. 46.

portable de-sanitising of apartheid era stories and images plays a key role'.⁸¹ The gap between 'entrepreneurial empire-builders' and 'community-minded nation-builders' has widened since 1994. As Lewis attests, while historians and artists, and state-supported programmes like the TRC, have been labouring to create a 'new' South Africa that can come to terms with its violent past and the suppressions and misrepresentations of that past, 'South African business has tended to want to take 1994 as a marker of an end of history or an end of politics'.⁸² It is critical, therefore, that the memories of the people who experienced the 'minutiae of social and community life under apartheid' should not be lost or 'erased in old or new forms of grandiose history writing';⁸³ as Brink argues, memory is a means of excavating silence.⁸⁴

Individuals, institutions and communities have collaborated in mapping the past and recording personal histories in the light of the findings of the TRC and criticisms of the process.⁸⁵ The challenge for community-based or local-level memory projects is arguably twofold. First, the absence of women in the histories of apartheid needs to be continually addressed. One woman, Nozizwe Madlala, who did testify at the TRC, noted that women in particular bore the brunt of the struggles against apartheid and her statement (quoted at the beginning of this paper) is worth repeating:

... history reflects the roles that men have played, women are often forgotten... If history is to be fulfilled, and women's contribution to the struggle acknowledged, the democracy we are building must not leave them aside on the margins.⁸⁶

Secondly, memory projects must also be connected to notions of social justice in order to be truly transformative. In developmental terms, decisions for societal transformation cannot ignore the gendered experience of conflict and violence. To prevent further repression and discrimination, there has to be a form of social justice. The government's commitment to human rights requires it to promote women's equality of opportunity, economic security, and protection from violence. The challenge is in allowing those people who do not have access to state-level processes such as the TRC to create collective memories to facilitate the process of healing, reconciliation and reconstruction. The localisation of the truth and reconciliation process and its associated community-based memory projects such as *Amazw Abesifazane* plays a critical role in this. Since the advent of the TRC, it has become increasingly obvious in the manner in which memory forms the basis of the oral historical archive. In the absence of any formal recording process, the creation of archives such as these becomes an important gesture towards holding a fragile history together. As such, these rather tentative and endangered human stories become part of the history that South Africans need to conserve. Creating postcolonial archives plays an important role in constructing individual and collective identity given the inability to conserve memory within the distressed communities that often results in the erosion of indigenous knowledge.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

82 *Ibid.*

83 Field, 'Remembering Experience, Interpreting Memory: Life Stories From Windermere', p. 119.

84 A. Brink, 'Stories of History: Reimagining the Past in Post-apartheid Narrative' in S. Nuttall and C. Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 29–42.

85 I. de Kok, 'Cracked Heirlooms: Memory on Exhibition' in S. Nuttall and C. Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 57–74.

86 Nozizwe Madlala, Human Rights Violation Hearing, Durban, 25/10/1996, <http://www.truth.org.za/special/women.htm>.

Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated that creating postcolonial, post-apartheid national memory-archives is significant in three fundamental ways. First, in memorialising the past, it is important to keep multiple versions of history alive and 'not to privilege, as has so often been done, a few master narratives that offer sense of unity at the cost of ignoring the fracture and dissonance'.⁸⁷ Resisting various kinds of amnesia is essential to the creation of a shared past and a shared sense of national and communal belonging. As Lewis argues, amnesia allows South Africa's business leaders to maintain their wealth and privilege while urging 'all South Africans to bury the past unconditionally'.⁸⁸ This amnesia threatens to erase past economic exploitation 'even as the actual bodies of apartheid violence are being exhumed'. Projects such as *Amazwi Abesifazane* and other social history projects play an important activist role in countervailing attempts to sanitise accounts of the past and blithely to sell South Africa abroad 'as if it were fully rehabilitated already'.⁸⁹ The memory cloths project, in particular, is important in starting to fill the 'great blank spaces of still repressed memory in South Africa'.⁹⁰

Second, a postcolonial archive facilitates the preservation of collective memories of traumatic events and the possibilities of healing. As Duvenage attests, '... the identity of the present and future South Africa will not escape a moral obligation to the past';⁹¹ constructing and preserving truly collective memory is, therefore, of the utmost importance. Collective memories, of course, have certain shortcomings. They raise questions about how collective they are and whose memories they are. There are also dilemmas about whether the memories of victims take precedence over those of perpetrators, or if myths of innocence and victimhood construct powerful obstacles in the way of confronting unwelcome facts. Chirwa argues, however, that because collective memory goes beyond an individual account, and has historical and emotional relevance, connecting seemingly discrete events in a cause-and-effect manner, it becomes part of the process of healing, reconciliation, and reconstruction at both the individual and communal levels.⁹² Therefore, Ignatieff is correct in arguing that nations do not have consciences, identities and memories like individuals; thus, they cannot be reconciled to their pasts by replacing myths with facts as individuals can, nor can they be healed by working through traumatic events or memories.⁹³ However, collective memory through the creation of national memory archives can be an effective tool for reconciliation and healing for individuals and local communities. As Stanley argues, newly emerging truths have had impacts at personal levels (individuals feel for the first time that they have been listened to by the state) and at collective levels (stories have challenged the traditional perceptions of groups and individuals).⁹⁴ For black women, the simple act of publicly telling a story in their own language has provided, and continues to provide, a sense of symbolic liberation.⁹⁵

Third, a postcolonial archive is essential in ensuring that women's voices can be incorporated into national projects of remembering and notions of belonging. It is particu-

87 S. Nuttall and C. Coetzee, 'Introduction' in *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 14.

88 Lewis, 'Sanitising South Africa', pp. 47–48.

89 *Ibid.*

90 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

91 P. Duvenage, 'The Politics of Memory and Forgetting After Auschwitz and Apartheid', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 25, 3 (1999), p. 17.

92 Chirwa, 'Collective Memory and the Process of Reconciliation and Reconstruction', p. 482.

93 Ignatieff, 'Overview: Articles of Faith'.

94 Stanley, 'Evaluating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission'.

95 B. Bozzoli, 'Public Ritual and Private Transition: the Truth Commission in Alexandra Township, South Africa 1996', *African Studies*, 57, 2 (1998), pp. 167–195.

larly important to consider the role of gender in erasing the historical agency of women and denying them agency in constructing archives in the present. Without spaces for the articulation of memory, black women's citizenship, in terms of social standing and belonging, continues to be compromised. The role of women's personal testimony in shaping the nation and citizenship is particularly important in a country such as South Africa, where the legacies of colonialism and apartheid have effectively silenced black women's voices. Those legacies persist today and the relating of personal testimony by black women is extremely important to their being able to claim space in the imaginings of the nation, both historically and as citizens in the present. As socio-historical processes, intimate disclosure projects ultimately become part of broader social movements that shape the dominant culture. Moreover, the participants produce valuable public discourses. The projects are potentially moments in the creation of a radical discourse, revealing a great deal about black women's experiences of racial and gender oppression and the ways in which their citizenship is constantly mediated through gender norms and power relations. As Graybill argues, there is a need to 'pierce that which destroyed or constrained women's voices'.⁹⁶ It is imperative that women do speak out, and only when they do will they begin the healing process. As Ramphele writes, 'exposing the wounds and having them acknowledged creates the possibility for the healing process to start'.⁹⁷ Women's private suffering needs to be made 'visible as social suffering, enabling them to stake their historical claims and thereby restore their dignity'.⁹⁸

Memory projects also have radical transformative potential since they are reflective of the strong commitment among activists in South Africa to create a 'rich knowledge based both on women's experience, and on the complexity of gender relations as relations of production/reproduction'.⁹⁹ These knowledges involve challenging the critical underrepresentation of women (in histories and elsewhere) by giving rigorous attention to their complex and multiple experiences. They also challenge the androcentrism of African knowledge production by asserting that African women can be producers of knowledge. This requires a commitment to applying knowledge to create social justice. Memory cloths programmes and broader social history projects are part of those knowledges that can be activated to bring about gender justice. They reveal the persistent economic and political discrimination against women and the intransigence with which unequal gender roles are inscribed into everyday life and socio-legal practice to compromise women's citizenship. They also reveal the various ways in which South African women are attempting to resist this to claim material and metaphorical spaces of citizenship and a sense of belonging.

Human rights abuses of the apartheid era, and the willing participation of global economies in prolonging the legacies of apartheid inequities and injustices, emphasise the importance of the flawed, fragile role of memory and oral disclosure and of constructing a postcolonial archive. The memory cloths of *Amazw Abesifazane* demonstrate that, to a large extent, the lived experiences of those who bore the brunt of state brutality have not altered, despite the promises of democracy. In allocating a space for those who have been previously silenced, the memory cloths programme is playing a small but significant part in affirming that individual experiences of trauma are important at a societal level, both in terms of the past and the present. This 'disclosed' oral history informs the legislative framework of amnesty and forgiveness required by the new South African Constitution and the importance placed on the culture of human values. Documenting such oral experiences

96 Graybill, 'The Contribution of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Toward the Promotion of Women's Rights in South Africa', p. 6.

97 Ramphele, *A Life*, p. 109.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

99 J. Bennett, 'The Politics of Writing', *Agenda*, 46 (2000), p. 5.

by means of an archival, legislative and creative process is essential to acknowledging the complexity of democracy in South Africa, and of women's role as active citizens. Forms of public representation by women are potentially a politically vigorous means of constructing visibility and accountability. As Bennett argues, echoing Zeleza, in order "to imagine a South Africa free of gender injustice, and to understand the intersecting vectors of racism and misogyny" in the present, "access to women's experiences of the past is critical".¹⁰⁰ Attempts, like the *Amazw Abesifazane* programme, to construct gender-sensitive postcolonial archives will continue to play a significant part in this.

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100 *Ibid.*