

THINKING ABOUT SELF-REPRESENTATION IN THE NARRATIVE-BASED APARTHEID ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Abstract.

The article explores the role that a number of self-presentation related issues might play in the construction of the Apartheid Archive Project (AAP). It argues that both the web-based portal method of data collection, as well as the nature of the material being assembled - that being autobiographical accounts of recollections of racism under apartheid - suggest the likelihood of a particular kind of participation or subjectification on the part of many potential contributors. In constructing such narratives it has been observed that authors may seek to manage the manner in which they represent themselves and significant others in order both to meet the objectives of the AAP (as they interpret these) and simultaneously to manage self-esteem and the manner in which they are likely to become objects of scrutiny by others. Four central themes are discussed in order to elaborate aspects of self-representation that may be implicated in the AAP, these being: The Confessional Imperative; The Knowing Subject; The Restricted Repertoire of Identificatory Positions; and The Implication of Significant Others. Each of these is discussed in turn, together with some illustrative examples from the existing archive material. It is proposed that while these kinds of narrative influences may be inescapable in the assemblage of data of this kind, that it is important for those engaged in analysing and interpreting the contents of this archive to appreciate the ethical, methodological and epistemological tensions posed by this hypothesized aspect of the archival material.

Key words: *Apartheid Archive Project (AAP), apartheid, self-presentation, self-representation, confession, race, identifications, positioning*

INTRODUCTION.

In standing back and taking a constructively critical view on the Apartheid Archive Project (AAP)¹ established in 2009, an area that warrants consideration is the possible role of self-representation in the construction of the archive. Although narratives have and will continue to be collected through various channels, one of the primary means of submission is a web-based portal. Thus far, the majority of the contributions have been offered by the research team and their associates and to a lesser extent the general public. Contributors are able to submit anonymously or append their identities to the narratives if they so wish. This means of participation suggests that self-representation is likely to be salient for many contributors to this archive. While it is evident that many of the analyses that have already been offered on different aspects of the contents of the archive have taken cognizance of discursive and performative elements of the kind identified as important in Potter and Wetherell's (1987) and Butler's (1999) work, there seems to be some merit in continuing to consider self-representation as implicated in a narrative-based archive in a focused way.

Reading the promotional/explanatory material on the AAP², it is evident that the project aims to develop a historical trace or repository of the personal, everyday and even ordinary effects of apartheid as they manifested in the lived experience of citizens. In some respects the project seeks to articulate more prosaic impacts of apartheid engineered race politics than those captured within the frame of the Gross Human Rights Violations (GHRVs) identified as the terrain of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In this respect the AAP seeks to fill some of the testimony gaps observed by those who were critical of the narrow brief of the TRC (see for example, van der Walt, Franchi & Stevens, 2003), suggesting that the limited focus on GHRVs obscured the more pervasive, heinous effects of apartheid, such as poverty, class exploitation, forced removals and displacement, and race-based discrimination and humiliation.

To the extent that the AAP seeks to fill this gap it appears to be aiming, at least to an extent, to establish some sort of historical record of what it meant or felt like to live under apartheid. In this respect the archivists appear to be interested in individual or singular experiences in order to identify patterns, themes or commonalities in accounts, and indeed many of the analyses of the presentations on the existing archive content have sought to do just this. Thus, while the critical reflexivity of those involved in the AAP means that researchers may be mindful of the pitfalls and tensions inherent in using autobiographical narratives to capture lived experience(s), they are nevertheless committed to the political project of laying bare some of the costs of apartheid, not only in the past but also in the present, and beyond this, to examining the implications of

¹ This project aims to document and analyse the narrated experiences of everyday apartheid life by ordinary South Africans. Potential contributors are invited to submit their narratives to the archive via a web-based portal. The project hopes to have committed some 5000 narratives to its archive in the long-term. Further information on the project can be found at www.apartheidarchive.org

² See www.apartheidarchive.org

such understandings for the ongoing transformation of South African society. In this way the focus of the project is well aligned to Jolly's (2010: 5) assertion that "[c]ritical narrative vision is crucial to tracing the disturbing continuities between South Africa's past and present, and rhetorical structures that encourage denial of those continuities. Such vision enables us to critique narratives as forms of listening that can 'hear' or capture certain subjects within the contemporary social, political and cultural moment". With this aim or purpose of the AAP in mind it seems important to examine some of the ways in which self-presentational dilemmas may be implicated in shaping the kinds of narrative contents that form the body of the archive.

Self-representation, also widely known as self-presentation and impression management has been theorised extensively. Under some of these early formulations, self-presentation is quite simply "to convey an impression to others which it is in his (sic) interests to convey" (Goffman, 1959: 4). More recent writing in the area has however demonstrated that self-representation is concretely fashioned by the communication context in which it is located. The internet is one such context (Suler, 1997; Gibbs, Ellison & Heino, 2006; Whitty, 2008). Much of the research on self-representation in an internet environment has focused on online dating sites (Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006; Whitty, 2008) and personal home pages (Papacharissi, 2002), with very few studies directly examining narratives of racism in an online environment. As a web-based archive the AAP therefore provides us with a useful opportunity to explore the politics of self-representation related to apartheid racism in a web-based context. In this article then we understand self-presentation as both a conscious and an unconscious attempt to provide a narrative that aligns the contributor to the perceived agenda of the recipients of the submission.

Despite flagging some concern with self-representation as influencing the construction of an archive consisting of autobiographical narratives, this is not to suggest that other kinds of archives, such as collections of records/documents from a particular historical period, necessarily bear a closer approximation to the *truth*. As has been well argued by many theorists in a number of different disciplines (see Posel, 2008), texts almost inevitably have some productive value. They also reflect the historical, political and social conditions of their production (Foucault, 1981). In the case of the AAP, what is significant is that the data producers are self-consciously aware that the material they are offering is in the interest of establishing some kind of public record and also that this material may become the object of analysis for research purposes. The guidelines³ for participation offer some degree of agency in the act of interpreting what is sought and how best to offer this. On the other hand, the lack of an accompanying interrogator (inferentially the researchers and/or the public) in the process of production, as would be the case in an interview generated account for example, may simultaneously contribute to self-doubt and greater self-surveillance. The awareness of authorial prerogative, as well as of the importance of the subject matter, highlighted through the caveat that "[y]our personal experiences are important for our society more broadly" brings a sense of weightiness and responsibility that is likely to translate into self

³See http://www.apartheidarchive.org/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=17

scrutiny of various forms in the production of the narrative. The article takes up the possible role of self-presentation in the AAP in relation to four aspects that seem to warrant deeper consideration, by no means suggesting that this represents an exhaustive examination of the topic. These four aspects are: The Confessional Imperative; The *Knowing* Subject; The Restricted Repertoire of Identificatory Positions; and The Implication of Significant Others; all viewed as potentially salient in the construction of autobiographical narratives in the context of the AAP.

In discussing each of these dimensions the authors have drawn to some extent upon their own dilemmas in thinking about submitting material to the archive as well as upon anecdotal accounts of others who have volunteered contributions. In addition, the discussion is informed by observations of various aspects of the existing narratives, as well as of presentations, discussion and questions that have arisen in the two conferences to date that have focused on the AAP. Bowman is one of the core researchers on the project and Eagle has been an interested collaborator. Beyond these sources however, the discussion is premised upon a speculative-theoretical mode of analysis (a framing for which we have to thank one of the reviewers of the manuscript). This mode of analysis involves the adoption of a series of hypothetical identificatory positions in which the motives, anxieties, fantasies, tensions and self-management strategies of hypothetical contributors to the archive are imagined and explored. The speculation is both theoretically and observationally driven, but is to a large extent inferential in that the material informing the discussion has not been consciously volunteered by a group of informants or participants. Rather, the authors offer a hypothetical account of what might *go through the minds* of contributors, aiming to substantiate the plausibility of this account by drawing upon related theory and some of the existing contents of the AAP. This kind of approach is in keeping with interpretive methods in psychological research which seek to offer theoretically-driven analyses of observational or interview generated data, although in this instance the data includes references to hypothetical subjects. It is argued that the manner in which self-representation is likely to shape and inflect autobiographical narrative contributions may often be outside of conscious awareness. This suggests that this speculative-theoretical mode of analysis may be necessary in attempting to access and explore such processes. In addition, as will become further evident in the discussion of the four dimensions, self-representation in this context may well involve some defensiveness of more and less complicated kinds. From this perspective there is also some merit in offering a hypothetical or speculative account of issues that may not be open to scrutiny via other means.

THE CONFESSIONAL IMPERATIVE.

One of the first elements that contributors may become conscious of in searching through memory stores to find a suitable autobiographical account is likely to be, somewhat ironically, self-censorship of information that is deemed insufficiently exposing or revelatory. While this may represent the attitude of a particular kind of academically and psychologically minded subject, for most modern (or even post-modern) subjects, an appreciation of disciplinary power and the popularisation of the mode in a whole number of domains, means that there is awareness of the expectation of conformity to a certain kind of confessional mode in this task. What this confessional

imperative implies is that as an author one needs to demonstrate or make manifest a particular kind of self-surveillance in completing one's autobiographical narrative.

In some ways then, the invitation to "submit narratives or short stories of their earliest and/or most significant experiences of race and racism in apartheid South Africa, to the project" is appreciated as an incitement to foreground racist discourse. The confession as a mode of participating in this discursive circuit is of the type that Foucault considers to be instrumental in a least two technologies of modernity. Firstly, the incitement to confess to participating in apartheid racism (whether as perpetrator or victim, as will be discussed below) levers the production of more data from which social research will no doubt generate more knowledge about racism. In this way, confessing to the archive feeds directly into human science knowledge production, itself a key relay in modern circuits of disciplinary power. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for this discussion, the imperative to confess to the archive is an important mechanism for self-subjection. In his later writings on the technologies of the self, Foucault (1984) considers modern selfhood to be constituted by four related parts. These are ethical substance or aspects of the self that are concerned with moral conduct, the mode of subjection or the way in which people are invited to perform their moral obligations, self-forming activity or the ethical work required of the self by the self, and lastly, the telos or the kind of ethical work needed if we are to liberate our true selves (Simons, 1996).

Against this theoretical matrix, the invitation to contribute to the archive may also be construed as an injunction to introspect, to subject the self to intense scrutiny within the markers of space, time and relationships⁴. It is therefore unsurprising that representations of the self in many of the narratives suggest that developing the narratives was laborious, psychologically taxing and daunting.

N 40: *"This is really difficulty exercise. I am not sure what to put down. It seems easier to theorise about racism than connect it to my own experiences."*

The confessional imperative demands evidence that the confessing self has struggled or taxed him/herself to reach the point of submission. It is apparent that contributing to this apartheid archive involves uncomfortable self-subjection to the force of apartheid discourse. Posel's (2008) reading of the kinds and modes of testimonies structured by the public hearings of the TRC suggest that this confessional imperative seemingly holds across the different contexts in which apartheid discourse is centred. "For both

⁴ The guidelines for submission explicitly call for the approximate year in which you were exposed to the experience reflected upon; the place; the key people involved; the impact, if any, this incident may have had on your views of yourself and your relationships with others today; some personal details which will be removed from the story if it is disseminated publicly, such as previous 'race classification' during apartheid, approximate age at present, region/province from which you originally come from, region/province where you currently reside, and gender.

victims and perpetrators, therefore, confession was represented as a journey to wholeness - a transcendence of inner damage - that enacted the reconstitution of the self, both psychologically and ethically” (Posel, 2008: 139).

Confession is a form of subjection; it involves the self-scrutiny and struggle implied by acceding to moral obligations, committing to ethical self-work and the discovery of a liberated, true self. In this sense we may understand the AAP’s submission portal not simply as a means to data collection but perhaps more critically as an important discursive contact point aimed at the generation of human science and self-knowledge via the confessional conduit of disciplinary power.

Interestingly, the audience to whom one’s account is addressed is unknown (in respect of who might read the archive testimonies), beyond the figures of the archivists or researchers. It is therefore tempting to consider the archive as being grounded in a type of panoptic architecture (Foucault, 1979). Narrative submissions to the portal, in as much as they are anonymous and confidential, are nonetheless also open to scrutiny by others. This precipitates some order of self-surveillance precisely because in the act of contributing, the narrator is simultaneously submitting a story of the self to the “constant view of individuals through parasocietal mechanisms that influence behavior simply because of the possibility of being observed” (Wynn & Katz, 1997: 310). While this is the case with much qualitative research, in the case of the AAP the autobiographical nature of the telling and the focus of what is to be told, is likely to heighten anxiety in anticipation of scrutiny. The only way in which one can speak to this imagined audience is by anticipating what it is they require of one and attempting to meet their expectations, at least in part, by being sufficiently confessional. Being a human and social subject, this task will be constrained by the co-existing need to protect self-image, as will be more fully pursued under a subsequent heading.

In line with Foucault’s rough genealogy of the confession that traces its early constitution as a practice driven by pastoral power through to disciplinary forms in modernity (Foucault, 1981), we would argue that the proper act of confession requires that the account is *authentic*, and that it reflects the *truth* of the events as far as the author is able to convey them - disclosure without censorship. What is implied is that the archive will only be meaningful and useful if the submitters bare their proverbial souls and offer as detailed and revelatory an account as possible. In a sense it is only by engaging with discomfiting or previously private contents that one demonstrates one’s commitment to the project. In addition to this, it could be ventured that evidence of the veracity of the story lies in the affective weight or loading that it carries. Narrative accounts thus need to provide the vehicles for description not only of *real* events but also of emotion-laden ones. One of the elements of self-presentation then is likely to be attention to a specific kind of truth-telling and the selection of accounts that bear these kinds of hallmarks of confession.

The following examples from narratives in the archive illustrate these kinds of confessional elements:

N 53: *“The fascination with a kind of denigrated, objectified blackness was often evoked in bodily kinds of ways, in the repetitive games and gestures of adolescent*

boys. Certain facial expressions, affected accents, ways of talking, referring to others, played out this denigrated blackness, performed it. So, to mock a fellow student you repeated his words more slowly, in an affected 'African' kind of voice, to make him sound like he didn't know what he was talking about, as if we were stupid ... There were also facial improvisations, flattening one's nose, spreading one's lips as wide as possible, making them as thick as possible, sufficed to mimic blackness".

In reading this account one is struck by its likely veracity precisely because the content being discussed is so obviously offensive and makes discomfiting reading. The detail with which the enactment of racism is described suggests that the author has held little back and the shameful nature of the disclosure speaks to the properly confessional subject. This is not to say that the author has in actual fact held nothing back because as Goffman (1959: 55) reminds us, impression management is an integral part of any performance "before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers". It seems that the author recognizes his complicity in something abhorrent and is willing to own up to this. At the same time, as will be illustrated within the next sub-section, the act of confession seems to necessitate the use of other rhetorical devices to protect the self. In the following quotations the sharing of affective distress, and in addition in N41, the sharing of the (usually private) discomfort of feeling dislocated from the self, can be understood as significant in signalling engagement in an authentic confession.

N 41: *"On entering this room and discovering what it was, I felt, in essence, diminished, treated like a black person, if you see what I mean. I had seen - no, felt - this sense of humiliation whenever my father was treated like a black person by young white police officers - that is to say treated with disrespect, less human, almost as if he was invisible."*

N 56: *"I recall as I violently pushed that little Toyota towards the Drakensberg my reactions then were visceral. In reflection I would say that anger and rage was the predominant feeling."*

Of course post-apartheid South Africa is a very different context to those that inform Foucault's rough genealogy. The neo-liberal, post-apartheid conditions in which the archive is embedded means that confession may not only yield absolution but also recognition of dutifulness or due performance. Ahmed (2004; 2005) points precisely to the way that self-mobilised critical commentary on race and particularly anti-racism are easily absorbed into neo-liberal technologies that encourage and re-write difference in particularly normative ways. Confession in this context may take the form of acknowledgement of one's implication and investment in a particular kind of liberal politics. This may illustrate a more contemporary, alternative rhetorical form of expiation, and links to some of the discussion of the *knowing* subject elaborated in the following section. It is also worth noting, that for some contributors, the less conscious recognition of this confessional imperative, may lead to the submission of bland and distanced kinds of accounts in which defensive manoeuvres suggest disguise of more difficult contents. It is also possible that a minority of contributors will submit counter-confessional or oppositional kinds of narratives in which there is evidence of resistance

to the dominant framing of apartheid practices as deeply abhorrent, such as in the example below.

N 38: *“I, myself, was never in favour of such discriminatory restrictions and feel they are to be regretted. But I don’t feel guilty about it. They were a small price the blacks had to pay for all the other benefits they have enjoyed through the presence of whites and what whites have brought to this country. The whites were their gateway to the achievements of civilization. Those achievements were not handed on a platter to the Europeans, but cost them dearly over a long period in their faltering and often-flawed struggles. The account of the suffering of millions and the persecution, torture and excommunication of thinkers and discoverers fill the history books. The price paid by the blacks to benefit from these achievements was infinitesimally small compared to what it had cost the Europeans over centuries.”*

The knowing subject.

In almost apparent contradiction to the confessional imperative, a second self-representational element is the concern to come across as a *knowing* or self-aware subject. Again, perhaps likely to be more prevalent in academically or psychologically aware contributors, it seems that in many narratives part of what the author is anxious to demonstrate is some capacity to reflect upon or examine their experience.

In audience responses to presentations of some of the archive content it has been evident that in those narratives in which authors display apparently problematic constructions of racially inflected interchanges without simultaneously demonstrating some critical self-reflexivity, there is an increased likelihood of judgment or public censure. Being party to some of this kind of critical judgment, we have found ourselves uncomfortable not only about the unreconstructed or racialised nature of the discourse but also about how the author of such an account is constructed by the audience at this point. In attempts not to become the target of others’ approbation or to become the unwitting exemplar of a problematic set of attitudes and practices, authors may believe it useful to attempt to head off criticism by penning a rhetorical pre-emptive strike.

N 20: *“Despite all my efforts to contribute to the development of a more caring society, I am aware that I have been, and continue to potentially be, a perpetrator and victim of racism. I hurt in both roles. I find healing in continuing to try to address these challenges, personally, professionally, and as a citizen in South Africa, and the world.”*

Thus it may well be that the confessional mode, perhaps especially in the context of racism in South Africa (see Wasserman, 2010) requires the accompaniment of at least self-interrogation, or ideally, self-criticism. One can admit to being party to shameful or difficult experiences providing one can simultaneously distance oneself from such experience in the present: *I was that then, but am not that now*. This kind of reconstruction allows for some separation between a past more culpable, more naive or more damaged self, for example, and the current self who in the act of reflecting is manifestly different or in some way redeemed. The demonstration of insight is one of the means by which one lays claim to and privileges a more mature or transformed self, a self that now displays the benefits of the wisdom of hindsight.

N 14: *“Reflecting on these incidences, I understand the insidiousness of racialised ideologies in the minds of young children - the ‘reservation’ of good shoes (and all the other good things) for white people, the exclusion of black people from certain spaces. And I re-experience the anger I feel towards my parents for sending me to a conservative (actually call that fascist) school, for supporting Apartheid (to this day, my father is one of the few people who still confesses to thinking that Apartheid was a good thing), and for making the journey that I have had to take to the anti-racist (and feminist) position that I now actively, consciously occupy, so very difficult. And even in that thought, there is shame. I am, in so many respects, not the victim.”*

N 40: *“Yes there certainly is a lot to do. To plagiarise a title, our social amnesia is scary. What this exercise helped to do was to confront this amnesia. I left out some of the identifying details and also changed my first draft. What am I scared about? The silence re-emerges? Yes I can emphasise the level of empowerment I need to achieve (I am ‘choosing’ this) or is it also that confronting this space even now feels too dangerous. Surely it cannot be reduced to my own paranoia.”*

It is worth noting that the intention to ward off censure (whether conscious or unconscious), is not necessarily likely to operate as intended. In some instances analyses of narratives will focus on precisely such manoeuvres, making these the main object of critique. An iterative process may become evident in which rhetorical gestures aimed at claiming responsibility and reducing culpability leave the author exposed to increased criticism, in turn increasing rhetorical defensiveness. What narrators have to come to terms with is the fact that once in the public domain their words become open to multiple interpretations which they cannot control by placing their own inflexions on their experience.

Jolly (2010), writing about issues of agency in relation to TRC testimony explores the case of Yazir Henri who was able to articulate the manner in which interpretations placed upon his testimony by others were alien to him and constructed him as a particular kind of subject with whom he was not happy to be identified. “Since testifying before the HRV Committee I have been called many names, placed within several stories, given several histories and the most harmful of narratives” (Henri, quoted in Jolly, 2010: 19). In order to resist the appropriation of his story Henri has had to become very active in exposing the ways in which interpretations of testimonies can do harm to the author and has insisted that his experience was one shared by many others. “‘My story is not unique’, he says (2003: 262), attempting to pre-empt representations of him that portray him as uniquely young, uniquely traumatised, uniquely betrayed. Henri conveys at one and the same time the emotional, social, ethical and theoretical complexities of his situation as subject of and subject to the TRC processes of witnessing” (Jolly, 2010: 19). Many of the contributors to the AAP may face similar kinds of pressures and dilemmas and one of the strategies that authors are likely to employ to engage with this potentiality will be to offer their own compelling interpretations of aspects of their experience. This may well contribute a further potentially rich layer for analysis. However it will be important to recognise both the now strongly debated methodological constraints this may imply (Potter & Wetherell, 1995;

Speer, 2002) in terms of narrative contributions and the ethical issues inherent in re-interpreting what has been offered.

In addition to the use of self-reflection to ward off the potential criticism of others, it is possible to understand the need to demonstrate *knowingness* more broadly. It is proposed that in the offering of contributions to this apartheid archive there may well be a perceived requirement to demonstrate access to what in psychotherapy would be referred to as an “observing ego” (Kohut, 1971). The author needs to demonstrate that he/she can make himself/herself the object of his/her own scrutiny rather than remaining immersed in his/her subjectivity. Again, one could understand this injunction to the self in Foucault’s (1979; 1981) terms. The subject of disciplinary power must not only confess but must also self-monitor and self-regulate. The disciplinary power of the psy-complex is thus likely to influence the construction of the archive via the performance of this kind of psychologised subject, the one who can think about and observe his/her experience rather than living or reporting it unchecked (Rose, 1996; Parker, 2007). Thus, in addition to the less culpable self-aware subject, one may well see a kind of careful tension emerge in many of the narratives, the balancing of sufficiently confessional material with material that highlights the reflective capability of the wise or *knowing* subject.

N 53: *“The first apartheid memory that springs to mind is of a series of events at High School. This, incidentally, was for me, the epicenter of much of my own experience of apartheid racism. Two particular facets of this experience seem important: the obsessiveness with which blackness was tirelessly re-evoked in a setting where there were no black pupils, firstly. Secondly, how, this theme, the endless playing to and fro of white versus black values, came to be animated in the teasings, denigrations and exclusions that some students exerted on others.”*

N 53: *“By doing this at the same time as mocking a fellow student - sometimes, oddly enough, affectionately (?), one would again set up the association of them as somehow black. In short, a series of racist stereotypes and bodily evocations became part and parcel of the repetitive play of white adolescent boys, vital instruments in the ongoing in-group/out-group identity practices of who was cool and who wasn’t.”*

In these reflections upon his narrative (aspects of which were presented previously) the author demonstrates his capacity to observe and to comment intellectually upon his experience with hindsight. In this respect he is able to suggest that he cannot in the present identify with the kinds of practices he was implicated in as a schoolboy. However, his self-commentary arguably only carries the weight it does in part as a product of its pairing with the confessional element illustrated above. Contributors need to appear to offer uncensored material and yet simultaneously to suggest that they have some insight into their own and others’ motives and positioning.

THE RESTRICTED REPERTOIRE OF IDENTIFICATORY POSITIONS.

A third aspect worth exploring is the likelihood that in respect of being a protagonist in a story having to do with race and apartheid, contributors will be aware of the fact that there is a largely predetermined range of subject positions with which they can identify. There can be little debate that in relation to apartheid the identity of the oppressors and

those who were oppressed was overwhelmingly determined by racial classification. Although there were obvious intersections of race and class relations, the coordinates of apartheid, (as opposed, perhaps, to apartheid Capitalism), were mapped by racial and ethnic categorizations, however flawed these may have been. It is therefore not difficult to infer that self-identified white and black participants in the AAP will make different kinds of identifications in talking about experiences of race and racism under apartheid. Without wishing to support narrow, inflexible and enduring racial categorizations and positioning, and recognizing the intersection of race with other identity categories such as gender, it is nevertheless worth considering that in light of both structural and ideological constructions of racial identities, the terrain which black and white authors can convincingly occupy is likely to be of a different nature.

For the sake of advancing the discussion (but acknowledging the possibility of a more nuanced hierarchy of racialised positions), and with the belief that narrators themselves will perceive their racial identities as salient, the constrictions on positioning available to white and black participants will be explored largely separately, in subsequent discussion.

For most white narrators the central identities available to them will be those of persecutor, beneficiary and/or bystander (Jolly, 2010), identities commonly associated with those belonging to oppressor groups. In debates about reconciliation and reparations emerging in the aftermath of the TRC it has been observed that few white citizens under apartheid would recognise themselves as villains engaged in the active persecution or oppression of black citizens. It has been observed that the focus on gross violations has enabled this disidentification, leading to the attribution of badness or even evil to a small group of aberrant agents of the apartheid state. Instead it is suggested that the closest that many white South Africans will come to owning some form of culpability may be in acknowledging that they benefited unfairly from the privileges that accrued to them under apartheid (although even this may be a stretch for many) (Posel, in Villa-Vicencio & du Toit, 2006).

It is apparent that the main identificatory positions available to white subjects of apartheid are negatively skewed, at least for anyone with a social conscience of sorts. While being a *beneficiary* or a *bystander* may be lesser evils in relation to being a more active *perpetrator* of apartheid, they are nevertheless problematic identity statuses, implying an exploitative and parasitic relationship to others on the one hand, and passivity and complicity in wrongdoing, on the other. What may well be observed in the narratives of many white authors is an uneasy tension between forced identification with one or other of these positions and the need to do justice to the complexity of subjectivity under apartheid. Indeed some contributors may go so far as to claim that they themselves were *victims* of apartheid and there is some need to recognize that for those who actively opposed apartheid, "race traitorship" (Straker, 2010) came at considerable cost. However, it is evident that there are more subtle ways of seeking sympathy through representing oneself as a *victimized white*. For example, it is interesting to note that in his piece in a recently published collection of essays about reconciliation, Hermann (in du Toit & Doxtader, 2010), makes reference to the incarceration and death of several of his ancestors in British concentration camps during the Boer War, apparently seeking to convey that suffering is not the exclusive

domain of black citizens under apartheid. There are also traces of this kind of identification with the victim position in some of the AAP narratives in which it is suggested that there were social and personal costs that went hand in hand with being a beneficiary.

N 61: *“And perhaps I also want to say that white folk have their own pain. I think many of them/us are very lonely. I have sometimes envied the fullness of life and community that seems more evident in township life. I think part of me longs for that. Pain is just pain – and we all have it.”*

N 20: *“Despite all my efforts to contribute to the development of a more caring society, I am aware that I have been, and continue to potentially be, a perpetrator and victim of racism.”*

While there is some awareness that the taking up of the victim position is not entirely credible when one cannot escape the structural position of beneficiary, there is nevertheless often some attempt to deny conscious complicity in apartheid practices. One of the ways that this is achieved is through the emphasis on one’s position as a child inhabiting a world created by adults and socialized into a particular kind of *habitus* in which perverse forms of relating were seamlessly woven into the social fabric of one’s life (Jolly, 2010). This is powerfully illustrated in the following excerpt.

N 60: *“I will never forget that look on her face when I announced that a ‘boy’ had come to visit her. I was ten years old and I used the racist patois of those around me. When she saw the man at the gate she slapped me across the face. ‘How dare a child call a man a boy?’”*

There is some evocation of the innocence of childhood with the inference that one was too young to properly comprehend what it was that one was implicated in. However, the cost of such a *defence* is that one then almost inevitably implicates significant others in the knowing execution of apartheid travesties and in so doing may damage another set of identifications (such as those with parents), as will be more fully explored in the next section. The fact that many of those who have and will contribute narratives were indeed children at the time at which the archive is targeted is likely to reinforce this mode of taking up an identity position/positions and again one is likely to see the introduction of: *I was that then but am not that now* kinds of speak, with an emphasis on prior naivety.

N 29: *“It took a short while for me to realize what I had done wrong. The men outside were not family, or friends. They were not ‘like us’. Of the five men, three were black. Black people did not ever come into our house as visitors; nor were they offered tea out of the special rose-covered cups. But even the two white men, who leant against the front of the trucks, smoking and chatting to one another while the black men unloaded, were not ‘like us’.”*

Flagging one further set of likely identifications available to white narrators is the possibility that they may attempt to balance negative positioning not by means of taking up the innocent or victim position but rather by emphasising that they also occupied the

positions of *helper*, *ally* or *rescuer*, allowing for what could be viewed as “compensatory self-presentation” (Tyler, 2009). This could be seen as the taking up of a more liberal position, in which it is suggested that while one might have benefited under the apartheid system, one also attempted to use one’s privilege for the benefit of others or to redress imbalances. This resonates with Madison’s (1999) iconography of the “anti-racist white hero”.

N 20: *“I learnt the value of communality in the struggle, and on making a contribution without expectations of reward (except intrinsic value). I also, however, embraced a self-harming approach to my own contributions at times, finding it difficult to push for my own position, or to fight for myself (when needed), or to take a front-line, publicly recognized stance.”*

Without wishing to minimize the very real commitments and sacrifices of white political activists during apartheid, it is likely that in even fairly mundane ways white contributors may seek exculpation and the retention of self-esteem by suggesting that they were not *all bad* and that this is/was evident in their *good deeds*. This is a temptation that may shape some white narratives and that is likely to enter into intrapersonal debates about how one represents one’s story in the AAP.

Turning now to the narratives of black subjects under apartheid it is evident that the most prominent identificatory positions are likely to be those of *victim*, *survivor* and *hero(ine)*. Much has already been written about the terminology of *victim* versus that of *survivor* (see Colvin, 2006). It is apparent that in the preference for the term *survivor* there is recognition that the identity status of *victim* is a negatively tinged one. Even if one is entitled to sympathy and even redress, one remains in the position of one who has been damaged and is deserving of compassion, sympathy, or even pity. Those who have sought to retain the term *victim* have argued that it is precisely this emphasis on damage sustained (whether temporary or permanent) that victims seek to convey. Interestingly, Jolly (2010), like some others, seeks to find a way out of this dilemma by referring to those who have suffered oppression as “victim-survivors”, suggesting simultaneous ownership of both sets of attributes.

It is evident in some of the existing AAP narratives that contributors have been aware of precisely this kind of nuance in their portrayals of themselves and others as the targets of racism. It is not only the receipt of racism but its potential internalisation that is particularly damaging to identity and in this respect some of the narrators seek to capture the manner in which a social wounding translates into an internal wounding. However, to convey this and take this on board is to suggest that one is still perhaps a product of this kind of damage and therefore in some respects is still compromised. The identification of oneself as damaged may be necessary to name the abuse that was apartheid, but equally there may well be some need to convey some escape from this positioning.

The survivor position offers one means through which to achieve this, picking up on the popular narrative of the individual who has grown through and transcended hardship to become a more resilient/mature person, and it may well be that this kind of narrative identification fits the experiences of many of those contributing to the archive. However,

there also appear to be other routes to avoiding over-identification with the victim position. One of these may be represented interestingly in Dlamini's (2009) **Native nostalgia**, a book that has captured the contemporary South African imagination in unexpected ways. Rather than representing life under apartheid in a monolithic way and as unremittingly bleak for black people, what this construction of identity seeks to do is to capture the rich and varied tapestry of everyday life in which it was possible to experience humanity, warmth, joy and creativity at the same time as economic hardship and political oppression. This attention to the nuances of a life lived in spite of being the object of prejudice is also evident in some of the AAP narratives and represents a resistance to taking up the over-simplified identity of pure victimhood.

N 4: *“Whenever I try to recall my earliest experiences, I try to focus on the many positive events that filled my childhood, such as following the marching bands and Malay choirs around the township on New Year’s Day, sneaking through the fence of the high school reserved for white children across the road with my friends and making a racket in the corridors so that the furious janitor could chase us, spending Christmas Day with our extended family in District Six and going to Mouille Point to watch the fireworks displays on Guy Fawkes Day. However, as much as I try to retain these memories, they invariably remain in my consciousness for merely fleeting moments before they are pushed aside by a series of rather cheerless reminiscences.”*

Then there may be a victim resistant set of identifications that represent a pride in identity in spite of, or precisely in opposition to, interpellation as a denigrated subject, as informed, for example, by the Black Consciousness Movement. In this kind of construction of the black self under apartheid there may be evidence of celebration or valorisation of aspects of black identity. This in turn may be linked to a more heroic set of identifications in which narrators represent themselves as actively resisting apartheid and as risking danger in doing so. Again, given the historical timing of the AAP it is likely that many of the contributors may well have been active in the struggle against apartheid and may choose to select this set of identifications to respond to the invitation to reflect on their early experiences of race and racism.

N 6: *“The centrality of the Black Consciousness Movement and the more critical politics of leftist organizations in the Western Cape provided me with a scaffold on which I could make sense of the world, understand my anxieties and prejudices, and find mechanisms to alter these constructively and coherently. It was certainly during this period of ferment that my own anti-racist consciousness became more firmly developed, and propelled me into my particular life passage.”*

However, it is equally likely that their identifications at the time and in the present were complex and complicated, not always and only heroic and resistant. It is also possible that for those black contributors who were not active or resistant there is some sense of lack in not being able to take up such identity positions in their narratives and that this may also relate to some sort of self-judgment and complicated self-representation.

N 6: *“... the Black Consciousness Movement was on the ascendency, student struggles were mounting against the racialisation of South African education, and the country was about to be thrown into a crisis that would amount to a historical tipping*

point for the liberatory struggle in South Africa. For many, it was truly a year of living dangerously – it was January 1976... My world however was reasonably sheltered from all of these seemingly external events. I was more preoccupied with the novelty of being at primary school, and my most serious dilemma was which of our neighbours I would ask to join around suppertime to watch television, which was a relatively new feature in many South African households.”

Of course we must also recognize that there are multiple positions that complicate dichotomous positioning⁵. We would suggest that it is inevitable that these multiple possible positionings will have some salience in the construction of the AAP. For contributors whose classification would have been as Indian or Coloured under apartheid there is likely to be a greater level of ambiguity in engaging with the identity of victim/survivor or one who has been oppressed. As Kometsi (2008) explores in his doctoral thesis, people classified as Coloured under apartheid, were in some respects held in limbo, unable to wholly identify with either blackness or whiteness. While obviously discriminated against in terms of the political system, those classified as Coloured or Indian enjoyed certain privileges relative to African people and in this respect were perhaps unwittingly or wittingly complicit in aspect of apartheid, *partial or limited beneficiaries* perhaps. The apartheid state was powerful in its instantiation of a kind of racial hierarchy which affected aspects of both public and private life. The narrative positioning of people who were located in this position of relatively lesser oppression is therefore particularly interesting in terms of looking at where and how identifications can be made. As illustrated below it is possible that the narratives of those so classified may tend to blur the lines between identifications with victimhood and perpetrator.

N 1: *“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.”*

N 6: *“There was also therefore an ironic fear of leaving the ‘safety’ of South Africa, and to enter another African country that was at war with itself, and where blacks were implicitly identified as the primary antagonists. This kind of contradiction and tension also in part reflected the racial politics of South Africa, the construction of ‘coloured in-betweenity’, and perhaps had greater resonance with the racial politics of the Western Cape at the time in particular - a reverent fear of the dominance of whiteness and a simultaneous fear of hostile African blackness.”*

⁵ Having employed the broad categories of *black* and *white* to structure this section of the discussion it is important to take account of the fact that *blackness* is a category that generally includes what were previously categorized as Asian/Indian, Coloured and African.

What is perhaps evident from this somewhat circumscribed discussion of the potential positioning of contributors as protagonists in stories of living under apartheid is that one of the ways of engaging with the limits of over circumscribed identity categories is to occupy multiple positions within one narrative (see N20, N1 and N6 above). While as contributors we might well appreciate that the taking up of some positions rather than others is likely to be differently socially sanctioned, we may equally then seek to manoeuvre within these constraints to represent ourselves as the contradictory and multifaceted beings that we wish to be seen as, and experience ourselves to be.

THE IMPLICATION OF SIGNIFICANT OTHERS.

One further feature of the AAP narratives that appears worth exploring in terms of self-representation (although perhaps something of a misnomer in this instance) is the awareness communicated in conversations with several contributors that their contributions necessarily implicate other actors. In many instances these actors are significant others with whom they have historical and/or ongoing relationships, very often parents, relatives or primary caregivers. This is obviously related to the guideline that directs the contributor to include “the key people involved” in compiling the narrative. However, the overarching structures and functions that appear to punctuate these inclusions warrants further scrutiny.

Self-representation in many instances involves the simultaneous representation of others to whom one has been and may still be attached (as well as of those more incidental to one's life). Concern about damaging these relationships in the submission of images that may represent the other in critical ways may be conscious at the time of production of the narrative, or alternatively may only become apparent in hindsight, potentially causing retroactive guilt.

However one conceives of the protections around the telling and the political merits of the project, there is also a discernible concern for a kind of relational ethics. Even if it is anticipated that these important people in one's life may never come to read the narrative there is the self-knowledge that one may have represented them or aspects of their behaviour as reprehensible, without their awareness or permission. In some instances it may only be at the point of documenting an event that the narrator becomes fully aware of particular interpretations and judgments that may well not be fully digested or appropriate to share with the subjects of such reflections in the present. What makes this awareness more poignant or difficult, perhaps, is that unlike novelistic accounts, the AAP accounts are ostensibly about *real* events and people. Thus while the submissions can be viewed as the responsibility of the author alone, there is the possibility that related actors may have mirrored back to them representations of their behaviour that were observed and noted in particular ways by the author/s, ways with which they may or may not be familiar, and with which they may or may not identify.

It may well be that in this respect participants feel that they have broken some sort of trust with significant others. This in turn may contribute to some feelings of having broken trust with aspects of the self that are identified with these significant attachment figures. Thus it may be both in one's imagined relationship of betrayal to the other and in one's betrayal of a valued introject (Kohut & Wolf, 1978) that one struggles in

producing an authentic account for the project. The social enmeshment of human actors means that it may well be nigh impossible to offer an account that only implicates the self. The manner in which other-representation is implicated in self-representation thus becomes yet another consideration in thinking about the contents of the AAP.

As raised previously, it is common for many of the AAP narratives to be told from the perspective of the child. The implication of this is that much of the child's experience is structured by parents and other adults who must bear primary responsibility for mediating the child's engagements with race and racism. There are many references in the existing submissions to recollections of information being conveyed in particular ways by parents and/or of observing older people engaged in racially overlaid interactions, these often becoming the trigger points for an apprehension of racism.

N 7: "Then I was five. I had just started school and was in the midst of a new adventure. But we had to leave to go to South Africa because my father would not have me going to school with black children. When I tried to convince him that I didn't mind going to school with black children, that we didn't have to leave home just because of me, I could not understand his derisive scoffing and scorn."

It is also notable that some comprehension of racism is often tied to noting attitudes or interactions on the part of attachment figures that appear contradictory and puzzling to the child. The effects of racism often seem to rob significant others of their integrity. In order for the narrator to sustain the position of the naïve one who comes to know something not previously fully apprehended there has to be some exposure to transgression on the part of others.

N 45: *"I didn't understand the implications then, but what I did wonder was, 'was my father telling the truth about black people'. This man was kind, and he could have been my father age-wise. He was kind, mature and easily read the context, and provided reassurance."*

Such transgression as described by many contributors was often of an intimate rather than a more public nature. Recognizing that one's parent or attachment figure may have transgressed or may have been lacking in their response to apartheid racism means that one has to take on board what identification with such a compromised figure entails and the unease this may bring (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008). This suggests that yet another tension that subjects contributing to the AAP may have to negotiate is that of necessarily implicating significant others in their experiential accounts, while simultaneously attempting to protect these others from exposure, and the self from the awkwardness or distress of identification with a flawed object.

CONCLUSION.

Having addressed what we perceive to be some of the important dimensions relating to self-representation that seem to have and may continue to shape the AAP, we hope that it is clear that we are not proposing that it is possible to collect data that is *uncontaminated* by human interests. It is important to acknowledge that the kinds of tensions, positioning, inferences and emphases that we have explored are inescapable in most human communication. What we have sought to do is to flag some of

mechanisms that may be at play in the construction of accounts in the AAP, both as a consequence of the manner of collection and the content of that which is collected. It seems important for those engaging with the AAP, including ourselves, to be particularly mindful of the multiplicity of factors that may shape the narratives of contributors and the multiplicity of identity positions that may be occupied by authors. This means, for example, that using excerpts from transcripts to illustrate specific arguments (as has been the case in this paper) always needs to be undertaken with some caution. Equally, we would argue that it is important to recognise the lure of reading the past through the lenses of the present (presentism) and linking meaning in the past to signification in the present via an uncomplicated causal chain (finalism) in the analysis of the AAP narratives. Notwithstanding these age-old methodological problems, the AAP is without question a valuable psychological and political vessel for documenting and understanding apartheid's pernicious impacts in the lives of people that would have otherwise remained beyond the reach of the historical record.

In addition, from an epistemological perspective it may be important for the project researchers to actively seek both to broaden the population of contributors and the methods of narrative collection. For example, students who contributed narratives in a group setting under some time pressure reported less agonizing over their contributions. In addition, we suggest that the framing of the invitation to participate in a narrative exercise needs to be as non-directive as is feasible within the aims of the project. It is also important to foreground the ethical burden placed on those who may seek to mine the contents of the AAP for both research and political purposes. If the observations proposed here carry validity, then it is clear that in some respects contributors could be understood as *gifting* the archive with their narratives, given that the experience is arguably taxing and exposing. Participation in spite of such risks deserves respect.

The authors recognize that their own particular identity positioning (including their identities as white, well-educated, middle class, adult, academic psychologists) has shaped the discussion in particular ways. The emphasis upon certain issues and the degree of elaboration of some ideas rather than others reflects this positioning and the degree to which this positioning limits hypothetical identification with the full range of potential contributors to the AAP. Both authors have a vested interest in the success of the AAP and the critical reflection is offered in a participatory spirit. It is hoped that open and careful reflection upon the possible role of self-representation in the archive will enrich the project, even if this introduces some difficult debates. We would argue that those who continue to work with the archive contents will need to be mindful of negotiating the tension of working within a dual hermeneutic of both suspicion and trust, and that this stance may offer some means of engaging with self-representation as implicated in the archive.

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