

## **EDITORIAL: FACING THE APARTHEID ARCHIVE**

*Garth Stevens  
Department of Psychology  
School of Human and Community Development  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Johannesburg  
Garth.Stevens@wits.ac.za*

*Leswin Laubscher  
Department of Psychology  
University of Stellenbosch  
Stellenbosch  
&  
Department of Psychology  
Duquesne University  
Pittsburgh, USA  
Laubscher@duq.edu*

When Jacques Derrida (1998) wrote **Archive fever** in the mid-1990s, its seminal importance was almost immediately recognised across much of the disciplinary spectrum, from philosophy to cultural studies, and from history to literary studies, to name but a few. Where mainstream psychology is concerned, however, the reception was reminiscent of David Hume's characterisation of his **Treatise of human understanding**, that it "fell dead-born from the press, without reaching such distinction as even to excite a murmur among the zealots" (2010: 3). What makes psychology's neglect of this text, and many others like it, all the more puzzling, is not only that the full title, **Archive fever: A Freudian impression**, clues as apparent a psychological connection as any, but that the very content of the text suggests a wrestling with issues that are profoundly psychological – issues and dynamics such as memory inscription and iteration, identity, loss and mourning, the desire for origins and continuities, and various responsibilities, limitations and possibilities that derive from a theory of memory and the archive.

To be sure, there is neuropsychological and cognitive neuroscientific interest in memory, thinking of it for example in terms of encoding, storage and retrieval; and implicating the structures of the hippocampus, the parietal lobe, sections of the frontal lobe, the amygdala, or neurotransmitters. Without entering into an extensive polemic about the shortcomings of such an approach, suffice to assume it here, and perhaps to axiomatically illustrate it by saying that to articulate the post-genocidal, or otherwise post-traumatic archive in narrow terms of cortisol or the amygdala, is to inflict another kind of violence on memory and memorialising. Moreover, even if one is to grant the sense of some organic localisation or substrate, thinking memory in terms of the

archive, or the archive as memory, involves so much more.

Psychology's limited engagement with matters archival remains somewhat of a set of paradoxes and contradictions. On the one hand, a foundational pillar of contemporary psychology remains that of psychoanalytic thinking and practice, in which the therapeutic practice of psychoanalysis and the socially applied forms of psychoanalytic thinking are constantly mining the archive that is the individual psyche or the collective social (un)conscious. Engaging historical material in these instances forms the bedrock of the practices and applications themselves. Freud reminds us boldly of this imperative, as early as 1895 already, when he writes that "a psychological theory deserving any attention must furnish an explanation of memory" (1950: 295). On the other hand, psychology has been repeatedly criticised for its ahistorical and depoliticised ways of examining psychosocial issues in particular – race and racism being one such social asymmetry that has been implicated – resulting in an almost anti-archival perspective that has characterised much of mainstream psychology in its evacuation of psychosocial issues from their socio-historical, political and cultural contexts. Why this contradictory relationship to the archive exists in contemporary psychology is perhaps better left for another place, time and space, but suffice to say, psychology, and South African psychology in particular, has had a limited deliberate engagement with the archive.

Of course it should be mentioned that small pockets of writing in psychology have started to engage with the archive, a preliminary investigation of which identifies two broad trajectories in research, writing and theorising. The first is in the area of thinking about the archive as a site or set of sites at which, and from which, data may be mined (see for example, Riessman, 2007; Cozby, 2008). More importantly for our purposes, the archive has also been implicitly taken up in inwardly looking reflexive research, writing and theorising on the development of the discipline and profession itself – most all in the tradition of Foucault's **Archaeology of knowledge** (1972), **Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison** (1995), **The birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception** (1994) and his body of work on the psy-complex (see Rose, 1998). As far as the *apartheid* archive is concerned, we find here too, that South African psychology has in the main had two deliberate and primary relational forms to it on the rare occasion when it has engaged it. The first has been to examine psychology's fundamental and intertwined relationship to social control and regulation prior to and during the period of apartheid (see for example, Nicholas & Cooper, 1990; Nicholas, 1993; Duncan, van Niekerk, De la Rey & Seedat, 2001; van Ommen & Painter, 2008), and secondly, more recently to engage the processes surrounding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as a social institution, especially in relation to historical trauma, memory, testimony, memorialisation and reconciliation/healing (see for example, Gobodo-Madikizela & Van Der Merwe, 2009; Hamber & Palmay, 2009).

These examples notwithstanding, the psychological neglect of the archive, in general as well as with particular South African reference, is clear. Part of the reason for this limited engagement can perhaps be attributed to the torrential ideological downpour of the *post-apartheid South Africa* discourse, which has fundamentally contributed to ongoing forms of historical revisionism and erasures of many of the *ordinary* historical traces and impacts of apartheid – or certainly a serious engagement with these traces – all in the service of creating a sanitised landscape of the *new* South Africa where

many of the residual footprints of apartheid history are systematically being expunged from the official records in the supposed service of peace, reconciliation and nation-building imperatives.

The Apartheid Archive Project was borne out of our organic experiences as citizens, academics and practitioners in this context, in attempting to understand and address the ongoing racialisation of South African society in all its perverse, overt and insidious forms. Consequently, we have argued that it is important to re-engage the apartheid archive because of the mutability and obstinacy of racism, and the continued racialisation of intergroup relations. Trapped by an ideology of tolerance (Žižek, 2008) and a national desire and discourse to look forward rather than to the past, the vicissitudes and contours of everyday personal accounts of apartheid are rapidly fading into a forgotten past. How we as psychologists and social scientists of all persuasions come to utilise these accounts to augment our understandings of the vexing question of xenophobia; the emotive debates about affirmative action, employment equity and institutional transformation; the forms of ethnic and identity politics that rear their heads each time we have an election; the racialisation of social ills such as crime and HIV/AIDS; the old, new and more subtle manifestations of racism; and of course, continuing forms of racialised subjectivities that characterise everyday South African society; are all some of the questions that we have been grappling with. In our view, revisiting history through a re-examination of the apartheid archive may provide a partial extrication from the social and intellectual impasse that many of us sometimes experience with regard to understanding and intervening around these issues. It was therefore out of this process that a loosely constituted group of national and international researchers formally launched the Apartheid Archive Project at its inaugural conference in June 2009 at the University of the Witwatersrand, titled, **Facing the archive** (see [www.apartheidarchive.org](http://www.apartheidarchive.org)). Here, we were concerned with not only *facing* this archive and confronting our history more squarely, but also beginning to repopulate this archive with the *faces* of ordinary South Africans who have been occluded from it in so many ways.

Of course this was not and is not the only project of its kind that critically re-engages the apartheid archive, and certainly the academy has already taken up this challenge in several ways (see for example, Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid & Saleh, 2002). In addition, civil society has had a fundamental social transformation stake in this process, and here we refer in particular to the work conducted by the Nelson Mandela Foundation's Memory Programme, the South African History Archive Project, The South African National Archives, the South African Oral History Association, and the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape, to mention but a few.

As with many of these projects, our intention is to engage intellectually, practically and publicly around some of the *big questions* in this area of work – on the transformation of public institutions; on critical blackness and whiteness studies; on the vagaries of memory and its selective inscription on contemporary subjectivities; on xenophobia or “Afrophobia” as some have referred to it; on the law and its limitations and possibilities; on collective and personal memories and their seemingly inexorable intertwinement; on the possibilities of new forms of identities and subjectivities in post-apartheid South Africa; on extending the archive to encompass voices from the Diaspora; on the psychological interiority of racism; on the intersection between race and other forms of subjectivity such as gender and childhood; on education and racism in post-apartheid

South Africa; and ultimately, to reflexively and critically consider the function of **the archive** (in its multiple, fragmented and incomplete senses) in contributing to the political, cultural and psychosocial life of SA in the present, and into an imagined future as well.

Practically, data from the Apartheid Archive Research Project will initially be housed at the Historical Papers Section of the Cullen Library at the University of the Witwatersrand, but we envisage linked sites where the data will also be available more broadly. In this manner, we would like to ensure greater access to the data and its analyses for other researchers, academics, anti-racist and transformation practitioners, members of the public sector and civil society organisations, educators, learners, students and members of the public. We encourage the utilisation of this data for materials development, for re-thinking our pedagogy, for insertion into the educational arena, and for critically thinking about South Africa's social, cultural and political life. In this way, we hope that data collected within the public domain will return to the public domain, for the benefit of the South African citizenry.

To this end the project has already hosted the 1<sup>st</sup> Apartheid Archive Project Conference: **Facing the Archive**, at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2009; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Apartheid Archive Project Conference: **Working with the Archive**, at the University of the Western Cape, in 2010; and we take this opportunity to invite interested readers to join us at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Apartheid Archive Project Conference: **Narratives, nostalgia, nationhoods**, to be held at the University of the Witwatersrand from the 27-29 July 2011.

This Special Issue of **PINS (Psychology in society)** emerges directly out of these first two conferences, and offers a snapshot of some of the thinking and debates occurring within the Apartheid Archive Project at present. Of course, it is not a comprehensive reflection of the project's activities and readers are also referred to the Special Issue of **Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society** (Volume 16, Number 1, forthcoming 2011), as well as the **South African Journal of Psychology** (Volume 40, Number 4, 2010) that also both address issues related to the archive and the apartheid archive, as reflections of ongoing work within the Apartheid Archive Project.

The first paper within this Special Issue by Garth Stevens, Norman Duncan and Christopher Sonn highlights some of the political and psychological drivers that provide a conceptual basis for the Apartheid Archive Project. Specifically, it focuses on the centrality and legitimacy of personal memories and narratives as fundamental to the expansion of the apartheid archive, and in countering the totalising effects of grand narratives and official histories. The article draws on community psychology principles, critical psychological theory, liberation psychology and decolonising methodologies in arguing that the very act of re-engaging and expanding the apartheid archive in itself opens up the possibilities for a liberatory praxis to emerge, in the creation of potentialities for re-examining and understanding our racialised histories, making sense of their propagated impacts into the present, and considering how such alternative readings of histories may highlight different possibilities for an imagined future.

The second article by Gillian Eagle and Brett Bowman notes that while narratives are an important source of archival data, we need to be mindful of their limitations. They argue that the nature of narrative solicitation in the Apartheid Archive Project at present

may give rise to heightened anxieties and social performances that may lead to self-censorship and an increased utilisation of self-representation strategies, which may in turn limit the nature of the data and the subsequent analyses thereof. In arguing that the narrative solicitation process may demand certain performances by contributors, they also suggest that we need to be mindful of not foreclosing the possible subject positions that are available to contributors in foreclosing the nature of data retrieval possibilities in the project itself.

Leswin Laubscher's article, drawing on the work of Derrida and Levinas, argues for distinct ethical obligations that frame the academic engagement with archival material, and argues for a "spectral scholarship" that is marked precisely by a call to responsibility in justice. By suggesting the figure and motifs of the witness and testimony for the researcher and scholar of the archive, Laubscher highlights particular dynamics, possibilities, issues, and cautions to keep in mind, and to orient our scholarship with and toward.

Brett Bowman and Derek Hook's article suggests vigilance against an over reliance on an exclusive narrative archive, and argues for an extension of the archive to include multiple data sources, or at the very least, for the researcher of the archive to be wary about definitive ascriptions of meaning and/or truth from one kind of data source. To that end, they utilise the case of the South African paedophile and illustrate through a genealogical analysis how the absence of *the black paedophile* was constructed by the conditions of possibility within apartheid that privileged white childhood as more precious, over any other form of childhood. Using multiple forms of data such as newspaper articles and official medico-legal records, Bowman and Hook show how the possibility of *a black paedophile* only emerges when there are changing configurations of childhood that extend beyond whiteness, to blackness as well, and their research provides a cautionary illustration of the ways in which dynamics of power and authority suffuses the archive to the very measure that it also hides and obscures itself.

Finally, Kopano Ratele and Leswin Laubscher offer some insights into the complex nature of whiteness during the apartheid era, in the final original contribution of this Special Issue. Using narratives from the Apartheid Archives Project, as well as from other archival sources, as collated by the South African Institute of Race Relations, they offer a number of interesting readings of how whiteness played itself out, including the suggestion that whiteness was not only fashioned around forms of violence directed at the black other, but that it also fundamentally enacted violence on white south Africans themselves. In so doing they argue that forms of privilege need to be understood in more complex ways, and that the stylised, taken-for-granted, regimes of truth about privilege (as with victimisation) should be destabilised to reveal their layered and complex operations and manifestations.

The Special Issue concludes with several recent book reviews of pertinence to the apartheid archive itself. Ross Truscott offers his thoughts on Jacob Dlamini's **Native nostalgia** as well as Koos Kombuis' **Short drive to freedom**. In each instance, Truscott points out how personal memories of both white and black South Africans who are reflecting on their lives during the apartheid era, both confirm elements of the accepted apartheid narratives of black and white experiences, but also destabilise what it meant to be black in South Africa's townships during apartheid, or as a white *verligte* musician parodying Afrikaner nationalism during the same period. The review by Roger

Brooke of **War and the soul** is a thought-provoking examination of cohorts of men and women who are often dismissed, looked on as pariahs, or vilified by history – those who find themselves in combat and operational settings on either side of wars. Brooke notes how the book reveals a failure of societies to re-integrate these men and women after conflicts, and the book will probably find resonance with many who saw operational duty as national servicemen/women or as members of various armed wings associated with the underground armed struggle in South Africa. Brooke notes how important it is for a society to own these men and women and not to disavow them in post-conflict societies, as part and parcel of the healing process for these individuals and the society as a whole. Indeed, the book highlights how traditional psychology, by conceiving of these returning men and women in terms of suffering from trauma as stress and anxiety reactions, places responsibility for healing within the individual soldier, when in fact the wound is a “soul-wound”, the healing response to which is profoundly broader than the individual, and inclusive of a community of the living and the dead. Finally, Ingrid Palmay reviews the most recent edition of **Critical psychology: An introduction**. She notes that the text is a reflection of the now well-established project of creating a community of national and international critical psychologists, and that as such, it offers students and those entering this sub-discipline of psychology a broad set of co-ordinates to engage this material, especially as it pertains to the transformation imperatives facing us in post-apartheid South Africa as psychologists.

All in all, we hope that the readership will find this Special Issue provocative. We invite you to engage with and respond to the contributions contained within it, and look forward to continuing conversations, dialogues and debates about the ongoing relationship between psychology and the apartheid archive.

## REFERENCES.

Cozby, P (2008) **Methods in behavioral research**. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Derrida J (1998) **Archive fever: A Freudian impression**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1995-French).

Duncan, N, van Niekerk, A, De la Rey, C, & Seedat, M (eds) (2001) **Race, racism, knowledge production and psychology in South Africa**. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Foucault, M (1972) **The archaeology of knowledge**. London: Tavistock.

Foucault, M (1994) **The birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception**. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M (1995) **Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison**. New York: Vintage Books.

Freud, S (1950 / [1895]) Project for a scientific psychology, **The Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Volume I**. Strachey, J (ed) London: The Hogarth Press.

Gobodo-Madikizela, P & Van Der Merwe, C (eds) (2009) **Memory, narrative and forgiveness: Perspectives on the unfinished journeys of the past**. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Hamber, B & Palmary, I (2009) Gender, memorialization, and symbolic reparations, in Rubio-Marin, R (ed) (2009) **The gender of reparations: Unsettling sexual hierarchies while redressing human rights violations**. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hamilton, C, Harris, V, Taylor, J, Pickover, M, Reid, G & Saleh, R (eds) (2002), **Refiguring the archive**. Cape Town: David Philip.

Hume, D (2010) **My own life**. Kindle e-book: Amazon digital services. [Orig. 1776].

Nicholas, L J & Cooper, S (eds) (1990) **Psychology and apartheid: Essays on the struggle for psychology and the mind in South Africa**. Johannesburg: Vision/Madiba.

Nicholas, L J (ed) (1993) **Psychology and oppression: Critiques and proposals**. Johannesburg: Skotaville.

Riessman, C (2007) **Narrative methods for the human sciences**. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Rose, N (1998) **Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

van Ommen, C & Painter, D (eds) (2008) **Interiors: A history of psychology in South Africa**. Pretoria: UNISA Press.

Žižek, S (2008) Tolerance as an ideological category. **Critical Inquiry**, 34, 660-682.