

Narrating Trauma and Suffering: Towards Understanding Intersubjectively Constituted Memory

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Abstract: Remembering is a complex and notoriously fallible process. This is partly because memory is not an exclusively individual act. Not only *what* we remember, but *the way* we remember is influenced by social circumstances and co-constructed worldviews, as well as by our personal needs and perspectives. In the context of the research interview, the researcher-participant relationship also mediates how experience is re-membered and narrated. All these factors need to be taken into account when, as social researchers, we attempt to unpack the meanings and motives that underlie what research participants say.

This paper aims to show how interviewees who have endured traumatic experiences for prolonged periods of time remember, reflect on and articulate their suffering. To illustrate how personal memories of lived, real experiences intertwine with socially and contextually embedded values and relationships we draw on the narratives of former political prisoners in South Africa and in erstwhile Czechoslovakia. We also present narratives of South African street children, and women living with HIV/AIDS.

When interpreting the in-depth data that show how participants remember their experience of suffering, we find that the very nature of memory poses a hermeneutical challenge.

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1. Introduction

As social researchers we strive to comprehend the world in which we live. To understand our social lifeworld we decipher the meanings and motives underlying human behavior. We do so by probing and unwrapping the rich, vital, in-depth data that reflect people's experiences, attitudes and beliefs. All researchers interested in revealing human meanings and motives accept that interpretive, qualitative methodology provides *the* key to understanding how people perceive

and experience their worlds. However, advocating the use of interpretive and qualitative approaches—either to supplement or even replace objective, quantitative approaches—brings its own set of challenges. Our very point of departure constitutes a methodological problem: namely that our subject matter in social sciences is fundamentally different from the material matter that occupies natural scientists. Because the basis of sociology as a disciplinary endeavor is to interpret social action and unpack meanings and motives, we are faced with a major challenge: people are endowed with consciousness and they see, interpret, experience and act in the world in terms of a vast range of subjectively and intersubjectively constituted meanings. When people actively construct and co-construct their own social reality, fluid and multiple perspectives of the world emerge: there is no single truth. This compels us to assess and re-assess, to interpret and to re-interpret our sociological enterprise. It is through a continuous oscillation between hypothesis formulation and revision that we move towards understanding. [1]

The narratives presented here originate in a series of four life history research projects from which we bring data to show how people who have endured traumatic experiences for prolonged periods of time remember, reflect on and articulate their suffering. Life histories allow us to learn about the way people live (RUBIN & RUBIN, 2005, p.8). As inductive researchers we focus in an interpretive-constructivist way on the specific details of what people tell us and then we use these specifics as a basis for building our understanding of their lifeworlds. We depend on the openness of interviewees and their willingness and ability to articulate experiences, recount events and offer explanations and opinions. This article attempts to show that no matter how well a researcher sets up the in-depth interview and creates a conversational partnership in which the interviewee participates fully and can talk openly, the very nature of memory poses a hermeneutical challenge. [2]

2. Intersubjectively Constituted Memory

Memory is commonly agreed to be a person's capacity to recall or summon up information stored in his or her mind. So remembering is often depicted as a mental act of "... thinking of things in their absence" (WARNOCK in MISZTAL, 2003, p.9). We acknowledge that memory has an embodied aspect to it, and that memories are often bodily experienced and expressed, but in this article we focus mainly on mental recall. This implies a strong emphasis on the *content* of memory. However we are equally interested in *processes* of re-remembering, in other words, in the *memory experience*. [3]

To re-member information, events, experiences and so forth, is a complex—and notoriously fallible—process. This is partly because memory is not an exclusively individual act. Even the most personal accounts and memories transcend our subjective experience of them, as they are shared and mediated by others around us (ZERUBAVEL, 1997, p.81). As Barbara MISZTAL (2003, p.6) remarks, our memory is always "... of an intersubjective past, of a past time lived in relation to other people." Thus memory is almost always "intersubjectively constituted"

(*ibid.*). This article picks up on this particular issue and attempts to focus the attention on the fact that memory goes beyond the definitive subjectivity of individual recall. Memory is by definition "... the leap across time from the then of happening to the now of recall" (FRISCH, 1990, p.22). The "now of recall" (*ibid.*) implies a triangulation between the experiences of the past, the set of circumstances within which these experiences occur and the way in which the individual reflects on these experiences. The latter includes the narrator's present circumstances. Although memories become adapted in this process, there will always be aspects that remain the same. As Paul CONNERTON (1989, p.23) points out, the habitual aspect of recall serves to entrench ways of reflecting on and narrating personal and societal experiences, and ensures—to some extent—the containment, coherence and continuity of meaning. [4]

From this it follows that the way in which we remember experiences from the past will be influenced by the nature of these experiences. Traumatic experiences will leave a negative memory. Whether it is sustained exposure to trauma—such as long-term imprisonment or the continued deprivation of a street child—or whether the trauma is restricted to a moment of numbing shock, the effects are likely to be similar: a negative disturbance in the way we think back to that part of our past. But, according to Kai ERIKSON (1994, p.231), in those instances where trauma is shared it tends to create a community: "... trauma shared can serve as a source of community in the same way that the common languages and common cultural backgrounds can. There is a spiritual kinship there, a sense of identity" He (ERIKSON, 1994, p.232) concludes: "Indeed, it can happen that otherwise unconnected persons who share a traumatic experience seek one another out and develop a form of fellowship on the strength of that common tie." With this statement ERIKSON shifts the notion of trauma experience from an individualized context towards a collective one. The result of this is that trauma obtains collective or cultural dimensions. Traumatic experiences become part of a collective consciousness—it becomes institutionalized (see ALEXANDER, 2004, p.8). While it is individuals who do the remembering, their remembering most often arises out of social contexts. [5]

It is accepted in qualitative research that some interviewees "... give socially approved responses as an interaction strategy characterized by responding in normatively correct and conformist ways and generally trying to present a good face" (ROSS & MIROWSKY, 1983, pp.529-530). We do not deny that to some extent this form of bias occurred during our interviews, but we are convinced that the narratives presented here are not unduly influenced by interviewees' wishes to articulate what they think *researchers* may want to hear. Rather, data suggest that participants' memories of suffering are composed and recounted in a way that makes their suffering more meaningful, worthwhile, and perhaps bearable, to *themselves*. This becomes evident in the analysis of narratives from former South African political prisoners, street children, and women living with HIV/AIDS. In these cases the narrators' memories were shaped in contexts where suffering was *shared* in close interpersonal relationships. Notably, these interviewees place less emphasis on the personal aspect of suffering and more emphasis on the shared ideas and ideals out of which their memories emerge. Where there is little

evidence of shared suffering, as shown in the narratives of former Czechoslovakian political prisoners, memories are bleak and devoid of hope or triumph. [6]

3. Introducing the Narrators

The narrative excerpts in this article are drawn from interviews with four sets of people in three different contexts. The first and second set of narrators spent protracted periods incarcerated in South Africa and in the erstwhile Czechoslovakia following political trials and sentences. [7]

The first set of narratives come from former political prisoners in South Africa who defied the apartheid regime and found themselves at the receiving end of a severe form of political violence—long-term imprisonment. These men spent the best years of their adult lives on Robben Island, site of one of the world's most notorious penal institutions. Unlike their famous leader, Nelson Mandela, these men were among the numbers imprisoned in the communal cells of the island prison. Their stories tell of the hardship of prison life, but also of the networks of human support, solidarity, learning and belonging. From these tales emerges a sense that the prisoners' survival depended on mutual compassion, collective unity, hope and patience. [8]

By contrast, the second set of narratives, namely those of former Czechoslovakian political prisoners, reflect a different experience of the suffering involved in long-term imprisonment. In their context, as political dissidents sentenced to political imprisonment, they were not distinguished from the worst common criminals. As prisoners they were rotated between a series of single cells and their isolation precluded them from forming relationships with other inmates. These former political prisoners look back at their political resistance as being futile and their disillusionment attaches a sense of meaninglessness to the sacrifices they made. [9]

Street children from Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa are the third set of narrators. They tell of poverty, physical abuse by parents and step-parents, as well as nutritional and educational neglect. Their narratives of suffering are told against the backdrop of their experience of the community inside the Amasango Shelter Career School where they now live. They emphasize the fact that they took their fate into their own hands when, out of desperation, they ran away from their family homes. From their stories it is apparent that they have been exposed to consultations, advice and discussions about their plight: their lives have been compared to what could and should be and ideas offered about how they can reclaim power and agency. [10]

Also from Grahamstown, the last (fourth) set of narratives is from women living with HIV and AIDS. Their stories rarely reveal the emotional trauma of their suffering as individuals. Instead, their stories and experiences are enmeshed in the principles and the ways of speaking and being assimilated at the local AIDS

center to which they belong. So the memories they offer abound with ideas and ideals associated with counseling and community action groups. [11]

The four sets of narratives on the impact of traumatic experiences is the subject of this article. In all the cases the traumatic experiences constitute the core of life stories told by people who suffered individual and social disruption, interpersonal disasters and hardship. In all four sets of narratives our analysis explores personal memory—individuals telling us about their individual recollections. These personal memories are often embedded in collective experiences, and this paper attempts to show that the collective experiences often shape the individual recollection thereof. [12]

Data were collected from four different projects. With permission from the narrators, the semi-structured, in-depth interviews were audio-recorded. Data were transcribed, translated into English, analyzed for content and arranged into themes. Excepting for the former political prisoners, who told their stories directly to us, we trained postgraduate students to conduct the interviews. The projects shared the same methodological approach. Each set of narratives begin with some details on sampling and the types of information solicited in interviews. [13]

3.1 Set 1: Political prisoners from Robben Island

The first set of examples of intersubjectively constituted memory of suffering comes from a project on the memories and individual experiences of former long-term political prisoners in South Africa (COETZEE, 2000). A remarkable feature of the Robben Island memories is the absence of bitterness and thoughts of revenge. What emerges from these texts is a characteristically African sense that human survival depends on mutual compassion and collective unity, and on hope and patience, rather than the cycle of discipline and punishment that characterizes the legalistic Western view. This is not to say that discipline was absent. In fact the opposite is true: African National Congress (ANC) structures within the prison wielded a considerable amount of discipline. But this was the discipline of the *collective* aimed at building the strength of the party, the comrades and the resistance. And so, ironically, prison provided a fertile ground for growing a sense of meaningful existence. [14]

The memories of former South African political prisoners who spent many years incarcerated with comrades reflect personal experience but they also incorporate a "constructed past which is constitutive of the collectivity" (MISZTAL, 2003, p.13). There is a close relationship between collective identity and collective memory and this is illustrated by the following narratives of two former Robben Island prisoners. [15]

Joseph Faniso Mati grew up in the Eastern Cape city of Port Elizabeth. He became a member of the armed wing—*Umkhonto weSizwe*—of the African National Congress (ANC) and was arrested in 1963. A year later he was sentenced to ten years imprisonment. Of his experience in prison he says:

"... Fortunately, when we got to Robben Island we found that the ANC was already organized. There were group leaders and a structure. So when we got there we were called by these people who were in charge. Then they would brief us and tell us that things were tough: 'This is what you must do and this is what you must not do.' They would tell us: 'Comrades, you must know that we are arrested here. We are in prison and the conditions are bad. So you must understand that the struggle continues. We have got to make the conditions better in prison. We are going to fight for many things. And fighting for these things will entail suffering.' "

"... We fought the question of piece work. With the assistance of a firm of lawyers in Cape Town, we challenged the right of the warders to force us to do a required amount of work ... Before the piece work issue was resolved the warders would be roaming around us and constantly complained about our slowness ... Later on, when they had done away with piecework, we decided on our own that we need to do some work. In prison the warders can destroy a person by forcing him to do senseless work. But you can also destroy yourself by doing nothing. We realized that we needed to do something physical because there was very little opportunity to exercise. You can't just hang around day after day. So we sometimes asked the warders to give us spades to go and do something to keep ourselves busy. Some of the youngsters who came in after 1976 couldn't understand this. They refused to work and we often told them: 'You can't just sleep for the whole day; you are going to die here!'"

"... In order to avoid a situation of people simply hanging around, the leaders decided that we must get busy in studies and in other forms of activity. These study periods were taken seriously. We appointed study officers from among ourselves. The role of the study officer was to declare the study period and to close it afterwards. Several things took place during this period but the ANC Disciplinary Committee (DC) concentrated on encouraging and enforcing two things in particular: studies and political discussions."

"... But the one activity that dominated our stay on the Island was the political discussions. No-one who spent time on the Island can say that he hadn't been strengthened politically. It was as if we couldn't get enough. There were those who wanted to discuss politics every day."

"... Although politics dominated our discussions, it was only natural that we thought about our people outside. Sometimes, you know, that thing of being a man, longing for your wife ... And especially because most of us were still young, we felt: Hey! I am getting old here. Certain things I cannot enjoy because of my stay in prison ... But then, through discussions with some of the others, we encouraged each other. When you fight for freedom these things have got to happen."

"... So we had these discussions on Robben Island and sometimes we were very frank. We would talk about it and say: Hey! Look here! When we go out we will find that terrible things have happened. Although it wasn't easy, we realized that we had to talk about these issues. We had to prepare ourselves and teach ourselves to endure these problems. When we got out, there were many of us who did not find their wives at home. Many of the fellows were divorced—no wife at home. They were remarried. Or others got kids by some other men. And that was something the ANC were doing in prison—preparing us for this kind of thing."

"... We kept on saying to each other: Our loved ones are struggling outside as well. But we shouldn't be thinking too much about the outside. We are here in prison. We can't change it." [16]

Monde Colin Mkunqwana was born and raised in East London, first living in servant's quarters in the backyard of a White family and later in a local township. From an early age he attended public meetings and later became involved in political activities such as mobilizing people against apartheid and operating underground. As with Joseph Mati, he was sentenced at the beginning of 1964 and spent 14 years in prison. He narrates:

"... The humiliation experienced on arrival was only the beginning. It continued in several other ways and coincided with a great degree of brutality. The brutality of the warders was clearly meant to instill the idea that the white man is superior. This was a concerted effort to suppress our dignity."

"... When we arrived on the Island there were incidents of physical assault, but that stopped later on. We fought against these assaults through our lawyers, and the Prison Services realized that they had to drop these assaults ... Although the physical assaults stopped, other forms of assault continued. We complained about these."

"... General conditions also illustrated the brutality of the warders, not only the assaults and the insults. The food and the clothing itself represented brutality. We were scantily clad there. We were given short pants and a pair of sandals—sometimes no sandals. And no socks; socks were only meant for coloreds, Indians and whites—black prisoners were not allowed to wear socks. That was brutality."

"... Coming to correspondence: they wanted to break us so that we would lose our resistance. On arrival we were classified as D Group, with hardly any privileges. We could receive one letter in six months, but this letter was usually heavily censored. If they didn't want you to see a sentence, they would cut it out with a blade. Most of the time they would cut into other sentences and in the end the letter would be so porous and damaged that you couldn't make sense of what is said. What can be more brutal than to sit with the only letter that was allowed for six months, not being able to make out what one's loved ones wanted to say?"

"... Sometimes we became despondent. We knew that our organization was in disarray—especially within the country. Sometimes there was that feeling: okay, if I die, I die; perhaps my people will at least bury me. Then we would analyze the news, any news that was remotely relevant to our incarceration. Especially news about the United Nations kept our hopes alive. We often said to each other that one day we would be liberated; maybe after ten years or fifteen years, but it would happen."

"... Many of our comrades were illiterate—couldn't read or write. Early on, right at the outset, we devised a system whereby if you have standard eight, then you must teach standard six—up to standard one or sub A. Each one teaches another. The prison authorities never had a hand in helping us. During that time there was another section that was being built. We used to take those cement pockets and convert them into books. Very skillful people among us would bind sheets of brown paper together in book form."

"... Political education was very important. We would discuss any topic. Of course, the history of our own struggle took up a high position. The political education included learning about Marxism ... Sessions for political education were often mixed with the discussions of those news items from newspapers that we could lay our hands on."

"... The type of education that I got on Robben Island was unique—nowhere else in the world could I get a better education. Before being sentenced to Robben Island most of us were constantly on the run. We hardly ever had time to sit down and to discuss issues—we were always on the move. But on Robben Island we had time to analyze where we had stumbled, what is our future, how to deal with issues."

"... I can honestly say that in a psychological sense I hadn't been affected by my incarceration. In fact, I had become very proud of my Robben Island days. Should I die today, I know that I fought for the betterment of my people and this betterment has been realized." [17]

From the two narratives above it appears that these intersubjectively constituted memories are formed through a circular process. The socio-political values, language and behaviors—the discourses—underlying the ANC movement are entrenched through political education in the prison. Exposed to a highly organized and intense educational schedule, and motivated by a common dream, the prisoners assimilate the values, language and behaviors of the ANC tradition. In the process, their experiences and their memories of personal sacrifice are shaped—and almost engulfed—by these discourses. The prisoners then think and act in terms of what they have learnt—in other words, they reproduce the ANC's social and political traditions. In this way personal memories, and the actual identities of the people who are remembering, become both the targets and the vehicles of the broader culture of struggle. [18]

3.2 Set 2: Political prisoners from the former Czechoslovakia

In contrast, the tales from the Czechoslovakian prison and labor camps are permeated by a sense of bleak isolation and lingering bitterness. Czechoslovakian prisoners lived largely without camaraderie or a sharing of common ideals. Instead, the individual was left to dig into his or her own inner resources for the strength to survive. [19]

Their personal memories therefore appear strikingly different. Those who told us their stories of resistance against oppression (COETZEE, GILFILLIAN & HULEC, 2004) relinquished the security and comfort of home and family for a grim prison existence and life in work camps. Unlike the Robben Island prisoners, the Czechoslovakians who were interviewed expressed doubt regarding the worth and meaningfulness of their sacrifice and suffering. At no stage during their incarceration did they experience any sense of community with other inmates. They wasted away in excruciating circumstances—frequently in solitary confinement—knowing that their families were being victimized. In their case there is no talk of any collectively constructed past where the sharing of trauma contributed to making the bearing thereof easier. Each one of them emerges from the experience of imprisonment distinctly disillusioned, although their

narratives also tell of a deep and lasting wisdom that developed within the cruel confines of the prison walls. Having survived the fate of the *mukl*¹ over the years their anger ebbed into stoicism and quiet courage. [20]

Rotated between series of single cells these isolated Czechoslovakian political prisoners had no opportunity to share experiences with other inmates and built no collective memories of their suffering. And as the interviews show (COETZEE et al., 2004) they focus mainly on their individual pain. This is illustrated in the narrative of Jiří Mesicki of Prague. He was tried in secret on the 15th and 16th of December 1948 for espionage and damage to the state, and sentenced to life imprisonment. He reflects:

"... I have recently—now, now in my old age—been haunted by dreams that they are after me—either that they are after me, or that they have arrested me, and that I have a court hearing. I remember waking up one night some weeks ago, with images of myself sitting in a chair with my hands tied behind my back. And they were beating me. And, you know, when I woke up I actually felt pain where they had beaten me. Ah! I still feel the pain." [21]

The Czechoslovakian former political prisoners perceive their resistance as futile and its outcome as having changed nothing for the better. They often claim that the perpetrators of the injustices had not been brought to book and that large parts of their national history remain censored. This reconstruction of the past is directly related to their present day identities and contexts. As Barry SCHWARTZ (2000, p.18) observes, memory "... at once reflects, programs, and frames the present." [22]

For Lola Škodova of Prague her "nightmare" began after the Communist coup d'etat in 1948. She became involved with a secret group that informed the West about the activities of the Communists. Arrested in 1951, she was sentenced to 12 years in prison. She comments:

"... Certainly, things are better, but we cannot talk of a victory—indeed, it is better not to even mention the word. We have still not been properly compensated. And nothing has been done to punish our oppressors. They have got away with everything—with the torture they inflicted."

"... Why is it that they have not been put on trial and witnesses called? Instead they have been allowed to profit from their evil deeds. Some Bolsheviks went into business, and have fled the country with millions. Many others still occupy influential positions. And today, none of my fellow prisoners are part of the elite. Do you know, not one is included in the current group of leaders."

"... Let me say it again. After 1989—the Velvet Revolution—the circumstances of my life remained the same, and I experienced no substantial change."

1 Acronym for the Czech words meaning "man destined for liquidation/extermination"—and a common name for a political prisoner.

"... Today I am no longer interested in any form of resistance at all. And certainly, any claim as to the value of our resistance and imprisonment should not be exaggerated."
[23]

Jiří Mesicki of Prague adds:

"... Yes, certainly, today we can travel, we can speak out, we can publish what we like. We have almost absolute freedom. But what is the value of this? For, you see, I believe that real democracy should be something more: it should embrace principles. I don't believe that people who are in politics here today have any political principles. They just want to hold on to their positions for the sake of money. If I had the power I would send most of them to work with a pick and shovel because they are not suitable for anything else!"

"... As for me, I have given everything up. I am not interested in politics any more, though I still hate the communists ... Nothing has really changed much—the same kinds of people are still in power." [24]

In the case of the former Robben Islanders, collective memory unites them. They are deeply attached to their shared past. They commemorate and celebrate their suffering and the freedom it unleashed. The disillusionment experienced by the former Czechoslovakian prisoners is lonely, individual, and pervaded by a sense of meaninglessness. As Lola Škodova declares:

"... Of course, I have lost everything I had. No, I would never do it all again. Never, ever. Never, ever ... No, I would think about things more carefully today—and I know that I would never do the same thing again." [25]

3.3 Set 3: Street children

This set of examples of intersubjectively constituted memory derive from a project on the lives and experiences of street children (under age 16) in Grahamstown, South Africa (MAYEKISO, 2005—as part of a project by COETZEE, 2006). The aim of the study is to examine how these children experience being on the street, the survival strategies they employ, and the different forms of suffering to which they are exposed. In this article we focus on how their memories and reflections are shaped by the institutions they encounter. These include the Amasango Shelter Career School for Street Children, the Student Volunteer Programme facilitated by the Centre for Social Development (CSD) at Rhodes University, and local Christian denominations working with street children. [26]

Lulama of Grahamstown recounts a tale of abandonment and tells of his hunger for "normality" and belonging:

"...You know, bro, as a person you have that *thing*—that you wish you could have. Things like clothes, so that you can mix with other children and not feel isolated. So ... if you ask for something from your parents and they promise you that you will get it at the end of the week, but when they have money they don't say anything. If

you try to remind them, you're just asking to be beaten up because they want to buy alcohol." [27]

He keenly feels the shame and blame associated with hunger and begging and feels misunderstood by his parents and members of the public. Issues of discomforting visibility abound in his narrative:

"... You know what, bro? It hurts me when people look at us [street children] and think that we're on the street because we don't want to listen to our parents. I wish people can ask us our situation back at home before they say anything about us. For example, personally I would love to go to school in the township because I like school but I can't ... No, Bhuti. It's just that when I think about what happened to me and compare myself to other kids ... Yho! I don't know why I live in the first place. What is hurting me worse are the responses we got from other people when I used to beg. Some black students at Rhodes and Victoria Girls say we are embarrassing them as if they're the ones who are begging. I then ask myself: 'If I don't beg how would I survive?' I eat here and I am happy [but] when I think about these young boys back at home [Lulama's brothers] ... the question I'm asking myself is do *they* have something to eat?" [28]

A sign that his perceptions are shaped by psychological ideas about how childhood *should* be, as opposed to his experience of it, emerges when he says:

"... My mother has failed completely ... she is not like other mothers. She's got no time for us and that's not good because she doesn't give us direction ... People look at us in different ways. For some people you can see they think we're on the streets because we don't want to listen to our parents. And people say all sorts of things about us. Some say we'll end up being criminals because we're learning tricks on the streets." [29]

He defends his position and offers an alternative truth:

".. .And that I don't like because they don't know the truth. They don't know how we survive everyday there ... Yes, in some cases other children who are on the street have run away from their parents without being forced to do so. And it's easy to see them because they always want to hide from their parents in town or from friends. In those cases I agree, you can't feel sorry for that person. But I think it's wrong to treat all of us in that way."

"... Hey, that is one of the things that forced me to leave home. Sometimes when you feel like there's no one on your side and you are powerless, you just do whatever comes to your mind ... So that night when my parents beat me and I had to sleep outside, I took a decision that they don't love me as their child. I am not saying they mustn't beat us when we are wrong. We are their children and if we're wrong they should punish us. But to sleep outside like a dog in the township is something that I couldn't take any more ... I would rather be on the streets ... I think it was when I was beaten for telling my mother that I'm hungry and after that being told to sleep outside. I think it was unfair ... I mean when you know that you've done nothing wrong. It was

when I made up my mind that enough is enough. It was [bad] to know that you have nowhere to go. But at that moment I didn't say I was going to live on the streets. I just told myself that I'm leaving, hoping that somebody will find me." [30]

Lulama's wish came true. He was found and taken in—albeit temporarily—by staff of the Amasango Shelter. He found kinship, belonging and a measure of safety there.

"... If I have to go back home I will miss mostly my friends because we know and understand each other here. No one can come and beat one of us here and walk away. If something happens to one of us we protect each other. Another thing is that now I don't really have close friends in the township because I'm here most of the time. So I think I will miss this place." [31]

But the note on which he ends his narrative signals that his sense of affiliation to the organization, its values and caregivers may have an element of lip-service to it.

"... There's a lot of benefits of staying here ... One of them is to get a chance to go to church. To know more about God so that you can pray when you need something. And also, as I was saying, to know that you don't have to worry about food or clothes." [32]

Thembaletu of Grahamstown is also a street child. He too found a temporary home at the Amasango Shelter and attends its Career School for Street Children. In this context the children are protected from the empty experience of exclusion. But the experience of *inclusion* brings with it a way of speaking that is full of concepts, values, and behaviors endorsed by religious and psychological or counseling discourses. With the result that Thembaletu's own unique personality—his own thinking and feeling—are almost absent in his narratives.

"... Since I came here I go to church every Sunday. We go to the Cathedral. For me going to church means a lot now, because I believe Jesus is alive and is there for me ... I think it's important for everyone to know about God even if things are going well for you at the moment, but you should know about God. Because you'll never know what tomorrow has for you. For me God is going to help me to be successful in life. That is why I want to be educated, so that I can get a good paying job, and if possible, do what Mom Jane is doing for us. Because it's not our fault, we are just victims of the situation we did not ask for. So I think it's good for all of us to have someone that we can talk to, share our problems with."

"... I've just decided to stop using alcohol ... I mean now I know what it can lead into. I think I will be stupid to continue using it though I see its consequences. My mother is so addicted, so I don't want to be like her. I'm still young, I've got my whole future ahead of me and I don't want to mess things."

"... What makes me happy is to be at school and go to church ... we are learning here and they give us food so that is why I'm happy because I'm just like any other children now."

"... For me poverty is this situation that we are in. The fact that we have to rely on other people to give us food and clothes...Well for me poverty is when the family is struggling to support itself ... like to buy food, clothes and send children to school. And the government is giving people grants so that they can overcome being poor. But look what people are doing in the township. They use that money to buy alcohol just like wealthy people." [33]

The extended time that these children spent on the streets armed them with an array of skills, knowledge and survival strategies. These make up the principal social capital at their disposal for negotiating reality and surviving in the public spaces in which they move. From their narratives it appears that a fair proportion of the street children's ideas, assumptions and strategies are shaped by institutional discourse and the language of helpers and counselors who work with the children. Being part of a group that is taken care of by an organized structure, namely the Amasango Shelter Career School, inevitably changes or edits the children's individual memories. A positive outcome is their increased levels of awareness of children's rights. We do not wish to discount the benefits that children derive from help generously given, nor deny the children's efforts towards and yearnings for a better life. But is the anticipation of benefits such as food and clothing enough to induce the children to "right-speak"? Do the children regard and respond to researchers in the same way that they would to potential benefactors? How much personal reflection is there in what they say? Paul CONNERTON (1989, p.23) defines habit memory as "... our capacity to reproduce a certain performance." Are the ways in which children remember and narrate their lifestories perhaps a function of need and habit? [34]

In Grahamstown few other experiences have been exposed in the local media—in newspapers, actuality TV, radio chat shows, funding drives and research projects—to the same degree as those of the street children. The topic of street children is highly visible (STEIN, 2004; SWART-KRUGER & RICHTER, 1997). It has been captured in its raw immediacy by local newspapers, local social welfare organizations, and by researchers and students of Rhodes University's School of Journalism and Media Studies, and several Departments within the Faculty of Humanities. To some extent the media and public exposure portrays the tragedy of street children as an exhibit—an almost objectified spectacle. This "picture" of suffering reaches many media consumers. But street children are also exposed to this "pictured" life—whenever they see the local newspaper or are involved in discussions of their plight, when they attend counseling and other social work interventions or participate in research. And this provokes the question: to what extent do the children knowingly or unknowingly reproduce publicized images of their suffering and their routes to salvation? [35]

3.4 Set 4: Women living with HIV/AIDS

The final set of narratives illustrating intersubjectively constituted memory is from Lisiswa and Themba (pseudonyms) who both live in Grahamstown. They are participants in an ongoing research project on women living with HIV and AIDS

(CHISAKA, 2004 & MANTSHULE, 2004—as part of a project by COETZEE, 2006). [36]

Shortly after finding out that she is HIV positive, Lisiswa, a young Xhosa woman in her thirties, began paying close attention to messages of national media campaigns urging people to "condomize." She also joined a local non-governmental HIV/AIDS Center which provides their clients with extensive HIV/AIDS related education and support. Strong alliances are formed between the HIV positive clients and they support one another to "live positively." A year or so after joining the Center Lisiswa fell pregnant. Multiple problems besiege HIV positive women—and particularly Black women—in South Africa. Contraception is a gender issue: it usually falls to the woman to urge her partner to use condoms, but more often than not, the men resist doing so (JEWKES, LEVIN & PENN-KEKANA, 2003). Moreover, they are often suspicious that the woman's request to use a condom signals her infidelity (*ibid.*). The following excerpt demonstrates Lisiswa's struggle to reconcile her new HIV/AIDS knowledge with her sexual practices. It is as if two parallel speakers inhabit her narrative—Lisiswa as she *is*, and Lisiswa as her AIDS education and her HIV positive friends at the Center tell her she *ought to be*. It is interesting that she constantly repeats statements indicating her knowledge of safe sexual practices. The effect is of a verbal veil being cast over her experience. And there are inconsistencies in her account: Why would she need to convince her boyfriend to use a condom if they *usually* use one? In such a complex and sensitive context, it is particularly difficult for a researcher to "bracket" assumptions, suspend judgment, and probe and unpack what Lisiswa thinks and feels.

"... Yah, what happened, you see, I didn't take any contraceptions. Because I know that I trust the condom, that I am gonna be condomizing. I told myself that I can't protect only the pregnancy without [protecting] the re-infection. So I must protect the pregnancy and the re-infection at the same time because for to, to, to be re-infected again it's gonna make me to be sick. So I just told myself: 'Okay the best way is to condomize so that I can't be infected again.' So what happened, the boyfriend that I did have, I tried to convince him about the condom and I didn't tell him that I am not using any contraceptive. And then I don't know what really happened that time because we normally use the condom. But that specific night, I don't know what happened. Things went horrible wrong, so I just conceive." [37]

Lisiswa avoids talking about herself and her feelings throughout the interview. Perhaps because she graduated from being a Center client to being a Center counselor, she repeats and reproduces her HIV/AIDS knowledge instead:

"... That lady is getting the Diflucan. So that's why I say to you she's gonna be fine, because the Diflucan is gonna heal the meningitis. The ARVs are gonna make her so, so strong. So she's gonna be okay, because she needed the ARVs because I think the CD4 count was very low ... When your CD4 count is low you gonna see the opportunistic infection are gonna be there ... You must first *treat the infection!* Because if you don't the infection is gonna be something very more to you and it's gonna make you worse off." [38]

Even when she recalls discovering her HIV status, Lisiswa skims over her pain and fear and draws instead on memories of how she took control of her situation—a common injunction in HIV/AIDS educational discourse.

"... When I saw I was positive I go and hide myself in the corner ... just close the door and go under the blankets and cover my head thinking about the virus. That thing doesn't gonna help me. Let me know exactly what is the virus—what will help me, what will boost my immune system. So I just told myself to keep myself busy—to read the books. You see that having those infections and other things—I can cure these infections...So I used to read the books and then after reading the book [it's as] if I've got something that's more important ... So I just told myself to know more about the virus and everything like that. *That* can help me to achieve." [39]

Lisiswa has, through the teachings of the Center, found new ways to think about and deal with HIV/AIDS. But ultimately she returns to the power of human empathy and, like the shack dwellers living on the margin, it is in her role of sharing and helping that she discovers meaning:

"... The moral support is the only thing that can make your heart to be healed ... I am the person that can help the other you see ... I can see that one is suffering from this. And I have this. I am just sharing." [40]

One of the most pressing problems attending HIV and AIDS in South Africa is the stigma attached to the disease (KELLY et al., 2005). One of the primary activities of the support Center to which Lisiswa and Themba (her narrative follows) belong is Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT). A key objective of the counseling component of VCT is to encourage HIV positive people to disclose their status. This opens the door to appropriate interventions for prevention and support. But disclosure brings pain, particularly the pain attending the anticipation—and the reality—of marginalization by the community (*ibid.*). Lisiswa is relieved that her pastor invited her to deliver a sermon in church and she interprets his action as evidence that despite being HIV positive he "sees me as a person." After disclosing her HIV status to her father and not being ejected from home as she had feared Themba comments: "You see, I am still a person to him." As the narratives of the shack-dwellers demonstrate "Umntu ngumntu ngabantu" ("A person is a person through other people") is an integral organizing principle in African, and by association, isiXhosa society. Marginalization and rejection by your community means that you will *not* be seen as a person. [41]

The Center's teaching has impacted positively on Themba's attitude to disclosure:

"... I don't mind the people who put a stigma on me. I don't mind because I know I'm HIV positive. I know my status. I don't care about those who are saying that one is saying so and so, that one is this and this. I don't care about those people. Because they didn't know their status. Maybe they are *very, very sick.*"

"... Ever since I admitted to myself, ever since that I know I'm HIV positive, ever since I accept myself, so I *don't* mind ... Yah, here I'm a counselor ... So it's nice to counsel.

To be counseled with somebody ... who is in the same position. Yah, yah, it's nice. And I am not afraid when someone is HIV positive, I'm not afraid to say: 'Look at me. I'm also HIV positive ... So I don't mind—not I am not caring—but I don't mind.' [42]

In South Africa cultural and racial issues remain contentious. And intersubjectively constituted meanings and memories are by no means a panacea to social divisions:

"... A person who attend workshops—the facilitator—told us that this virus is the White virus. It came from the Whites. So maybe ... why this virus [comes] to us is because of poverty. Because we are Black people. We go out and sleep with White people. Maybe that's why it's too many high [the HIV prevalence amongst Black South Africans]."

"... Poverty brings many things in the Black community. That's why there are so many diseases among our people, like AIDS. The reason why, is because of unemployment and if you get a piece job you bring what you got to the others at home. One tells oneself that one is going to do anything to survive." [43]

Contact with the counseling provided by an institution such as the HIV/AIDS Support Center in Grahamstown undoubtedly contributes to the way in which the women reflect on and re-member their experience of living with HIV/AIDS. Participation in the activities of the Center contributes to developing a particular social identity. Lisiswa and Themba look away from their individual plight towards healing. As counselors they have power: they can re-integrate themselves into the wider community in a personally meaningful way, as well as help to shift attitudes towards the disease and people living with it. For both Lisiswa and Themba perhaps the distressing discovery that they are living with an incurable disease is softened by the awareness that their personal problem is closely linked to wider social tragedies such as gender inequity, racial divides, homelessness, and poverty. When suffering becomes linked to historical injustices it may be more bearable than when individuals have to shoulder all the burden and responsibility of their plight. [44]

4. Conclusion

The issues raised in this article relate to the broader sociological context of memory, and more intricately, to the intersubjectively constituted nature of memory. We argue that to interpret narratives of suffering one needs to take into account their socio-cultural as well as their personal dimensions. To understand trauma narratives one needs to incorporate all individual, intersubjective and collective facets that play a role in the process of remembering. These facets weave together to form our reflections on the past. [45]

With the four sets of data that we cover in this article we illustrate the effect of intersubjective and collective factors on the process of remembering. The very close contact between former Robben Island political prisoners provided opportunities to exchange ideas and to relish their loyalty to a shared cause and

the belief that they actively contributed to the liberation of their people. All of these have an effect on the way in which they look back at their ordeal. These former political prisoners were also exposed to a kind of structuring when forming and recalling their traumatic experiences. Vaclav HAVEL (1990, p.43), himself a former political prisoner reflects on a similar issue, based on his own observation:

"... Twenty or thirty years ago, in the army, we had a lot of obscure adventures, and years later we tell them at parties, and suddenly we realize that those two very difficult years of our lives have become lumped together into a few episodes that have lodged in our memory in a standardized form, and are always told in a standardized way, in the same words. But in fact that lump of memories has nothing whatsoever to do with our experience of those two years in the army and what it has made of us" [46]

The second data set, namely the former Czechoslovakian political prisoners, reflects very little, if anything, of a solidarity and collective identity that resulted from shared political discussions and education. The absence of support and encouragement during their prolonged trauma contributes to a bleak and bitter retrospection. This data set illustrates the effect of the absence of supportive collective factors on the process of memory. [47]

The third and fourth data sets illustrate a different dimension regarding intersubjectively constituted memory. Earlier we mentioned that Rhodes University research projects and the local Grahamstown media often publicize issues to do with street children and people living with HIV/AIDS. Both groups have also been counseled and were recipients of social work interventions. It is often the case that their conditions/situations have been explained and analyzed in their presence. These intervention processes contain conceptualizations of their experiences; they provide guidelines that construct how the subjects reflect on their situations. When they talk about their experiences they draw on these guidelines and analyses. [48]

Memory of suffering is not simply a personal recollection. Memory also exists through what has been shared with others. When claimed by individuals as their own, shared memories become integrated into their personal narratives. Yes, each individual will remember in a unique way, but in remembering "... we are re-fashioning the same past differently, making it to be different in its very self-sameness" (RADSTONE, 2000, p.13). In the unique memory of each individual are shared influences that we, as researchers, need to identify, re-interpret and unpack. By doing so in this article, we attempt to reveal the interplay between social and individual suffering. We also allude to the difficulties of probing and unpacking participants' personal thoughts and feelings when their memories are shaped and their narratives steeped in "right-speak"—in the institutionalized discourses that merge our personal with our social realities. [49]

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