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An Unfinished Homecoming: Postmemory, Place and New Practices of Politicisation in the Plays of Nadia Davids and Amy Jephtha

Ksenia Robbe

Abstract

One of the main aspirations of the early post-apartheid period was the idea of homecoming, which involved hopes for restoring peace and rebuilding communities, restitution and healing. Thus, engagements with cultural archives and performances of memory have become an inherent part of communities' struggles for repossessing land and homes. One of the iconic sites of such performances has become District Six with its history of forced removals and its former residents' intense social and aesthetic preoccupations with different layers of the past. This essay focuses on two recent plays that reimagine home spaces through innovative strategies of remembering – Nadia Davids' *Cissie* and Amy Jephtha's *All Who Pass*. By analysing the plays' temporalities and reconfigurations of space through postmemorial practices, this essay explores their strategies of working with archives.

1 Introduction: The Impossibility of Return

One of the main aspirations of the early post-apartheid period was the idea of homecoming, which involved hopes for restoring peace and rebuilding communities, for restitution and healing. The “rainbow nation” was to become home for all. Yet two decades after, the number of homeless and destitute people has not diminished, and the narrative of the “new” South Africa reveals multiple cracks. The problem of reclaiming spaces within the new country has appeared more complex than it seemed, involving not simply legal rights but also issues of heritage and social justice. Thus, engagements with cultural archives and performances of memory have become an inherent part of communities' struggles for repossessing land and homes.

Cape Town, having been one of the most multicultural places in South Africa prior to the forced removals during the 1950–70s and having turned as a

result into the most segregated city by 1985,¹ has become one of the major sites of critical inquiry and symbolic contestation since the end of apartheid. At the same time, it became the place of most aggressive commodification of space, with the city bowl and western seaboard turned into luxurious residential areas and tourist-oriented sites. After all, with the racially segregated areas remaining “relatively unchanged,” “most people in Cape Town continue to live segregated lives and continue to be ignorant of the lives of people in other parts of the city.”² According to the dot maps that show current racial distribution in South African urban areas, Cape Town appears to be the most unequal place in the country, its ghettos being “most crammed” with non-white people.³

Reflection on this lack of meaningful transformation, despite the ongoing efforts of intellectuals, artists and entire communities, has led to what I consider in this chapter a new turn/stage in artistic and critical engagements with questions of space and memory in post-apartheid culture. Writing about new public arts projects of the late 1990-early 2000s (such as District Six Museum, District Six Sculpture Project, PTO, Y350, Returning the Gaze and In Touch Poetry Bus Tour), Cape Town-based curator Zayd Minty considered these works as carrying out the project of symbolic reparations, initiated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and “making a particular connection in Cape Town with contested urban space and the fraught terrain of national heritage.”⁴ Later examinations of public art in Cape Town, while similarly emphasising the significance of such projects for transforming the city’s racialised geography, have been markedly less optimistic. One of the turning points in the recent history of civic and artistic engagement in the city was the case of Prestwich Place, an area adjacent to the tourist centre. In 2003, an eighteen-nineteenth century burial ground with the remains of over 3000 humans, most of them slaves and the underclasses, was discovered beneath the ground designated for private-sector development. Debates around the appropriate ways of dealing with the remains led to a confrontation between the developers and the archaeologists appointed by them, and the Hands Off Prestwich Place Ad Hoc Committee who were resisting the planned exhumations. The result of the conflict’s mediation by the South African Heritage and Resource Agency was

1 Catherine Besteman, *Transforming Cape Town* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), 47.

2 *Ibid.*, 48.

3 Jared Sacks, “Mapping Neoliberalism,” *Africa is a Country*, Sept. 24, 2013. <http://africasacountry.com/2013/09/mapping-neoliberalism/>.

4 Zayd Minty, “Post-Apartheid Public Art in Cape Town: Symbolic Reparations and Public Space,” *Urban Studies* 43, no. 2 (2006): 438.

that the bodies were exhumed and removed to a memorial site created in the vicinity. This utilitarian solution which supported the gentrification process and disregarded the community's plea for time to mourn and make sense of the "forgotten" histories⁵ signified a serious challenge for the project of symbolic reparation. Other historical points of realising the impasses in earlier post-apartheid projects of restoration included forced relocations in the run-up to the World Cup 2010, the Marikana massacre of 2012, and the student protests of 2015–16. During the past decade, this challenge has been addressed by a number of critical and creative projects and has resulted in reconsidering the vocabulary and methodology of working with archives as part of public memory interventions, some examples of which I will examine here.

One of the key realisations has been the "impossibility" of adequate restoration and return. The 2015 documentary *An Impossible Return* by Siona O'Connell, former director of the Centre for Curating the Archive at the University of Cape Town, encapsulates this realisation perhaps in the most direct and acute ways. The film features several former residents of Cape Town's central districts who have returned to the places and sometimes houses which they were forced to leave three decades ago as well as those who had never gotten the opportunity to return. It reflects on whether and how their longing for home can ever be publicly recognised as an unhealed psychological wound and addressed not as part of a bureaucratic process but as a step towards countering "the unfinished business of apartheid."⁶ Calling return an "impossible" project, here, is not a sign of defeat, but a rhetorical gesture meant at articulating a critique and forging a resistant consciousness. It invokes an aporetic impossibility, entwining the desire and necessity of return with a recognition that no complete redress is ever achievable – one can only aim to engage as sensitively as possible with the archives, treating them as open-ended structures that connect past and present, and that open into the future.

These are the processes which this chapter will trace in two plays, Nadia Davids' *Cissie* (2008) and Amy Jephta's *All Who Pass* (2015), which, similar to

5 According to Heidi Grunebaum, "exhuming the bodies performed a material delinking of the historically aggressed from the moral and historical grounds of claim: for mourning, for reckoning, for social, spiritual and political regeneration and for the modes of enumeration that proclaim, "This happened here. Here and not there. This is the place and it happened here." Heidi Grunebaum, *Memorializing the Past: Everyday Life in South Africa after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 139.

6 "Coming Soon: *An Impossible Return* – An Exhibition and Documentary Directed by Dr. Siona O'Connell." *Centre for Curating the Archive*, 12.06.2015, <http://www.cca.uct.ac.za/coming-soon-an-impossible-return-an-exhibition-and-documentary-directed-by-dr-siona-oconnell/>.

O'Connell's films,⁷ re-open archives – through the media of oral history and photography – to speak to the present in a consciously active and activist way. Both plays engage with the processes of spatialisation in Cape Town, and particularly with the spaces of District Six, an iconic site referring to the history of forced removals and its former residents' intense social and aesthetic preoccupations with different layers of the past. These plays' engagement with issues of spatial injustice in Cape Town (and, by extension, in South Africa at large as well as other postcolonial places) is defined by their performances of (post) memory (more on this term below); it is, I will argue, at the interfaces of their work with imaginations of space and time/memory that they propose new approaches to restoration and "homecoming."

While the outlined above crisis of imagining restoration in South African city and other social spaces has engaged artists and writers working in different genres and media, recent theatre productions preoccupied with the spaces and places of Cape Town, and their theorisation of memory and archival work, have been at the forefront of devising new methodologies of representation. Discussing the production of his play *Cargo* as a response to the crisis signified by the Prestwich Place case, Mark Fleishman reflects on the possibilities of theatre performance to intervene into the problems of remembering in the postcolony. In particular, he focuses on the paradox of the postcolonial situation: it "demands remembering" while the particularities of the postcolony (defined in Achille Mbembe's terms of multiplicity, excess, hysteria and superfluity⁸) "render remembering highly problematic, if not impossible."⁹ While "set[ting] out in search of coherence, of new ways of being together," forms of historiographical productions in the postcolony "tend towards disruption and discontinuity and ultimately dissolve back into fragments."¹⁰ He, then, discusses *Cargo* – the play he directed, which engages with the fragmentary archives of slaves' lives at the Cape – as an example of alternative remembering that temporarily assembles a vision of the past only to let it fall apart into fragments.

7 Among O'Connell's other films and exhibitions engaging with similar issues and intervening into current practices of public memory are *The Wynberg 7* (2015) and *Promises and Lies: The ANC in Exile* (2016).

8 In his reference to Mbembe's theorisation of the postcolony, enlisting the above-mentioned terms, Fleishman summarises the concept as "the multiple, contradictory moments of everyday life in Africa read against the persistent accretions of slavery, colonialism, apartheid and neo-liberal forms of democracy" Mark Fleishman, "Cargo: Staging Slavery at the Cape," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 21, no. 1 (2011): 8.

9 Mark Fleishman, "Cargo: Staging Slavery at the Cape," 10.

10 *Ibid.*, 19.

This methodology of archival recreation departs from the idea that historiographical productions can ever restore what is absent, but this does not suggest a deadlock. Rather, it leads us to understanding performative historiography as a situational process of interaction between performers and audiences – a “history of the present” that “must be worked at, brought into being, creatively imagined, re-invented, collectively sustained, argued over each and every time.”¹¹ In a similar vein, Nadia Davids,¹² reflecting on the production of *Cissie* and its later version, *This Woman is not for Burning* (2011), defines her search for the most poignant form of representing the life of the early twentieth-century woman activist from District Six in terms of testing “the efficacy and limitations of *restorative* archiving and historiography” and critically exploring “the potential seductions of hagiography.”¹³

Fleishman and Davids’ engagement with the issue of restoration after a catastrophe can be read in terms of distinction, suggested by Ernst van Alphen, between different strategies, and hence different effects, of archival work in visual and performative art.¹⁴ Elements of what the playwrights refer to as “restorative” archiving comes close to van Alphen’s discussion of works that reflect the intensified “memory crisis”:¹⁵ trying to recreate (private) histories with the aim of setting the record straight, such practices tend to have additive rather than transforming effects. On the other hand, works that recover certain details that allow for “actively engaging this past into our political present”¹⁶ reveal more productive historiographical engagements. This practice of “reanimating the archive” produces difference by “turning memory into an almost literal re-calling that makes the past more present than those moments that are contemporaneous to the viewer’s time.”¹⁷

When reading texts and performances which engage with memory in the postcolony, it is hardly possible to dismiss the restorative, “homecoming” imperative, as the above discussion attests. Taking this into account and considering the meanings attached to the places of District Six, the “lost” home, my discussion will focus on the dynamics of restorative and reanimating

11 *Ibid.*

12 Davids collaborated with Fleishman on several occasions, e.g. in staging the play *Önnest’bo* (2002) as well as *This Woman is not for Burning* at the Magnet Theatre he directs, thus one can definitely speak about cross-pollination of ideas between the two researchers and playwrights/directors.

13 Nadia Davids, “‘This Woman is Not for Burning’: Performing the Biography and Memory of Cissie Gool,” *Social Dynamics* 38, no. 2 (2012): 255, my emphasis.

14 Ernst van Alphen, *Staging the Archive: Art and Photography in the Age of New Media* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2014).

15 *Ibid.*, 247–250.

16 *Ibid.*, 265.

17 *Ibid.*, 266.

approaches to this archive in Davids' and Jephta's plays. This dynamic, I suggest, is facilitated by the structures of postmemory – an imaginative investment of “generations after” into the past experienced by their (grand)parents and the stories spun around that past.¹⁸ Postmemory here works as a way of interrelating different histories and memories that concern the same historical place and the problems of belonging associated with it. But, even more importantly, it enables a dialogue between different *strategies* of archiving – those performed by the plays within the present-day context *and* those, recalled in the plays, that were used during the 1980 and 1990s within anti-apartheid movements. This interlacing of memories and strategies of remembering is staged as a work of comparison, which is also a work of learning, situating and imagining future strategies.

My reading will proceed as an analysis of postmemory – focusing on the plays' reanimations of photographic images from District Six, and what can be understood as their “watching”¹⁹ through performance, and discussing the feminist aspects of this postmemory. Drawing on this analysis, it will discuss the plays' innovative methodologies of recollecting the past. The last section will consider these methodologies as creating new practices of politicising historiography. I will conclude my reading with some observations of Davids' most recent production *What Remains*, the European première of which within the Afrovibes festival in the Netherlands was presented by Jephta in October 2017, considering how the described strategies of comparative remembering might point at new horizons of imagining restitution, beyond the aporia of impossibility.

2 Performing Postmemory of District Six: “Watching Photography”

Among the reasons for comparing the two plays are the biographical affinities between their authors. Nadia Davids and Amy Jephta both come from District Six families; born a decade apart, but both after their families had been relocated, they grew up in Walmer Estate and Mitchell's Plain, respectively. They both graduated from the University of Cape Town's Drama department and became internationally renowned playwrights in their twenties. Both combine the practice of playwriting and academic work that engages similar historical

18 Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29, no.1 (Spring 2008): 103–128.

19 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Rela Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

and theoretical issues – among them, the past and present of Cape Town Coloured communities, Muslim identity and womanhood in South Africa, and transnational and local migration and belonging. Davids' doctoral thesis both staged and examined practices of "inherited memory" of District Six; both authors have written on the *Kaapse Klopse*²⁰ as a tradition of resistance to apartheid spatialization.²¹

Furthermore, in their creative and academic work, both authors continuously reflect on their experience of (non)belonging and their search for identity in post-apartheid South Africa *in relation to* the somewhat similar entrapments and transgressions of earlier generations that were part of the Coloured and Muslim communities. In exploring the inscription of this relationality in their plays I rely on Marianne Hirsch's conception of postmemory as "describ[ing] the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up."²² This is not exactly a memory but a type of recollection that "approximates memory in its affective force."²³ In contrast to the Holocaust postmemory practiced by the generations who were not direct victims of violence (yet often claimed victimhood), the nature of trauma and hence postmemory in the (post)apartheid society is different in that the violence of dispossession directly affects the "generations after" who are still barred from the areas and institutions of privilege. But their relationship to District Six as one of the ghost-like places that signifies the privilege of return is still mediated by stories and images.

Both Davids and Jephtha, like most descendants of District Six families, grew up in the environments that were full of stories entwining family and community, biography and auto-biography, the real and the fantastical. Jephtha's

20 *Kaapse Klopse* is a yearly Carnival, practiced since the nineteenth century by Cape Town's multicultural population most of whom were termed under apartheid as "Cape Coloured." *Klopse* is the Afrikaans word for "club" or "troupe." Although the festival has been officially renamed "Cape Town Minstrel Carnival," the colloquial name is still very popular.

21 Amy Jephtha, "On Familiar Roads: The Fluidity of Cape Coloured Experiences and Expressions of Migration in the Performances of the *Kaapse Klopse* in Cape Town," in *Performing Migrancy and Mobility in Africa: Cape of Flows*, ed. M. Fleishman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 164–179; Nadia Davids, "It's Us': An Exploration of 'Race' and Place in the Cape Town Minstrel Carnival," *TDR: The Drama Review* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 86–101.

22 Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 106.

23 *Ibid.*, 109.

grandmother,²⁴ just like the older character in the play, would recall the traumatic events through fairy tales and supernatural characters: only those houses where jinns lived were to be demolished by bulldozers.²⁵ Davids foregrounds anecdote as a form of witnessing and transmission of memory that has shaped her own vision of District Six, and she uses it as a strategy of recollecting the figure of Cissie Gool, a prominent anti-apartheid community activist who was part of several socialist movements in the 1930–60s and a strong opponent of government's appropriation of District Six, and who died just before the removals commenced. Davids' and her autobiographical narrator's second-hand memory of Cissie is, then, made up of anecdotes which typically conflated family and community in acts of affective storytelling. She recalls:

When I was little, *I just assumed that Gool was a relative*. Partly because my community tends to stretch its familial connections beyond the always explicable: "He is your uncle – he's your father's half-brother's father-law's cousin – so he's family," and partly because her name was spoken with such familiarity.²⁶

In both plays, the process of postmemory is initiated by the authors' engagement with photographs of District Six. The script of Jephtha's play is preceded by four photographs providing central images that structure the scenes of the play taking place in 1974 and involving the main character's mother as a ten-year old, together with other family members and neighbours. According to Davids, her re-imagining of Cissie was guided by two main archival sources – the samples of her own oral history research from the early 1990s (representing Cissie in very contradicting ways, these contradictions showing how vital her image has been for shaping later generations' identities) and a selection of seven photographs from different periods of Cissie's life.²⁷ The photographs signified for Davids a series of choices on the part of Cissie and turning points in her personal and political life, which is reflected in the play's structure as a sequence of seven episodes narrating a history of community through the story of Cissie's life. In the later version of the play, she revised the linear structure and supplemented it with a series of monologues *about* Cissie by her contemporaries, performed by the same actress. This structure represents biography as a puzzle, rather than a conventional historical narrative, that can be assembled

24 Amy Jephtha, personal communication with author, Cape Town, January 2017.

25 Amy Jephtha, *All Who Pass* (Unpublished playscript, 2015), 24.

26 Nadia Davids, "This Woman is Not for Burning," 257. My emphasis.

27 *Ibid.*, 253–276.

and re-assembled by the viewers. Such fragmentary form induces a process of reading similar to what Ariella Azoulay has called “watching photography” – an act that, in contrast to “looking at,” involves the dimension of time and movement in the creation of a relationship between the image, the photographed and the viewer.²⁸ Following Azoulay, reading a photograph that represents a person who has suffered some sort of injury “becomes a civic skill” as it “reconstructs the photographic situation and allows a reading of injury inflicted on others.”²⁹

Hirsch regards photography as “a primary medium of transgenerational transmission of trauma”³⁰ since it creates an embodied connection that implies affiliation beyond family lines. Self-reflective engagement with photographs initiates postmemorial working through traumas – which, in the post-apartheid context, are continuing and multiple. In opening “a window to the past,” photographs connect positionalities of past and present³¹ and, according to Azoulay, create a “civil contract” that temporarily establishes a citizenship-like equality between the photographer, the photographed and the viewer, and thus create a larger community.³² Significantly, this act of implicating a different community “deterritorializes citizenship, reaching beyond the conventional boundaries and plotting out a political space” of democratic participation.³³ Relating the two positions – of bringing together different temporal positionalities and of constructing a democratic relationship – in her reading of Jansje Wissema’s photographs of District Six on the verge of destruction, Kylie Thomas argues that such images can make visible forms of resistance that were previously not recognised and can re-actualise them for the future.³⁴

Similar to the act of “watching photography,” Jephtha and Davids’ plays *reanimate* past futures by enacting them through performance. Engaging with the iconic images of children playing in the streets of District Six, often among the rubble from demolished houses, *All Who Pass* imagines the way the children (represented by the ten-year old Aziza and nine-year old Sam) coped with the reality and anticipation of loss by collecting and cherishing old broken objects and creating a treasure map (as Aziza does) out of an eviction notice. These flashbacks from 1974 intermingle with episodes from the present of 2013 when

28 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*.

29 *Ibid.*, 14.

30 Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” 103.

31 *Ibid.*, 117.

32 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 25.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Kylie Thomas, “Photography and the Future in Jansje Wissema’s Images of District Six,” *Safundi* 15, no. 2/3 (2014): 283–305.

Nadira, the twenty-nine-year old main character who grew up in Britain after her mother Aziza (the girl appearing in the flashbacks) emigrated from South Africa, visits Cape Town to receive the keys from one of the newly built houses granted to her mother after fifteen years of waiting. Meanwhile, her mother is on her deathbed; she asks Nadira to travel to the place of her childhood and do as she feels fit. Nadira travels together with her British boyfriend who is trying to offer her moral support, but the longer she stays in the house, the more she experiences his presence as interfering the development of a new relationship with the place and her mother. She starts seeing visions of her mother and family and even speaks to them, emerging in her present, neither she nor they realising that timelines have merged and that they are now able to communicate across the temporal divide.

Another moment of re-invoking past resistances takes place when Nadira meets her uncle Farooz dressed as a “coon” for the parade in District Six, having travelled all the way from Hanover Park (the district to which the family was relocated). The encounter compares him to the present-day carnival procession which Nadira witnesses and enjoys, but it does not assimilate him into the present. His speech and attitudes are represented as distinctly from the 1970s, and it is this difference that alerts Nadira to the resistance that was practiced in District Six through lifting its (male) inhabitants above the ordinary existence of segregated spaces and limited possibilities. The play ends with Nadira and Aziza, as a ten-year old, in the last minutes before relocation, chatting and watching the sun rise over the mountain. These encounters – between Nadira and Farooz and Nadira and Aziza – create a representational equality between the differential social positions of the two generations, their injuries, and their quests for belonging, along the lines of Azoulay’s civil contract. While not conflating the two temporal planes, they stage a dialogue across them. Thus, they “respond to the photographed future”³⁵ (the ways in which the future was imagined in the past) and implicitly deliberate possible constructions of future in the present.

3 Feminist Performances of Postmemory

Similar dialogues take place in Davids’ *Cissie*, in the opening and closing scenes, when the autobiographical narrator Sara attempts to “remember” District Six by gazing at its gaping spaces. At the beginning of scene 4, she transforms into Cissie – an act that represents the effects of embodiment in the

35 Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 16.

work of postmemory. In the later version, Davids abandons this fusion and represents Cissie through the stories of others, without the figure of the mythologised woman appearing on the scene (in a sense, this performance is more “photographic” as it is structured as an assemblage of stories not connected by a narrative). But back to the earlier version, its structure juxtaposes two temporal planes from the past: Sara as a high-school student in 1993, trying out the role of an academic by conducting archival research on Cissie Gool, and Cissie, expecting her third child and struggling to complete a degree at the University of Cape Town during the 1930s. In the latter part of the scene, we witness the heated arguments between Cissie and her parents (her father Dr. Abdurahman, leader of the anti-segregationist movement African Political Organisation, and her mother, Helen Potter who was part of the suffragist movement in Scotland). In an uncompromising way, Cissie criticises her father’s accommodationist politics, claiming that only by protest and complete defiance of government policies can equality be achieved. Part of her radical critique is her decision to oppose the university system which, even though allowing her access to education formally, in practice bars her from equal participation, as a woman, mother, activist, and a black person. In the dialogue with her mother, she undermines the idea of an easy affiliation between them, arguing that her mother is unable to understand how she feels at a “white” university. In response, the mother expresses an intersectional vision saying that “oppression has many faces” and that she is able to relate to the experience of being racialised through her struggles as a feminist.³⁶ She supports an ideological link through a memory of embodied connection by recalling: “The first time I held you, our eyes locked, and I knew then that you were like me. You looked a little like me, I thought, but it was much more than that. You felt like me. You and I – we don’t walk the easiest paths.”³⁷ This episode, similar to the cross-generational dialogues in Jephtha’s play, juxtaposes experiences of oppression and resistance at different historical moments but in the same space of racialising practice; it problematises what we think of as “exceptional” (the story of a non-white woman in the early twentieth-century South Africa) by rendering it in the context of continuing “ordinary” violence of racism and sexism. Similarly, these conversations make visible the particular tensions, practices of resisting as well as visions of future from the past while making us think about their implications in the present.

As can be seen from these intimate conversations between mothers and daughters, both plays exemplify what Hirsch calls “feminist postmemory”

36 Nadia Davids, *Cissie: The Playscript* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 36.

37 *Ibid.*, 37.

which is “defined by a particular mode of knowledge about the other, a particular intersubjective relation of ‘allo-identification.’”³⁸ In an opening scene of *All Who Pass*, the women of three generations appear to be almost physically drawn together: “the muezzin’s call weaves around the three figures, binding three generations together across space and time: mother (AZIZA), daughter (NADIRA), grandmother (NAZREEN).”³⁹ Throughout the play, Nadira is only able to speak to her mother when male characters (Ben, Salim) are absent (at the beginning, Salim’s appearance “breaks the spell”⁴⁰); moreover, her pushing Ben out of the house and almost breaking up with him is a result of Nadira’s growing connection with her mother – both in the present (calling and thinking about her dying mother) and past (talking to the little Aziza).

The practice of postmemory, however, is not easily initiated: the connection between women of different generations is not given, but has to be forged through self-introspection and intersubjective translation. It proceeds through silences, myopia, and misunderstanding. At the beginning, Nadira is struggling to relate to the place of District Six and the new home: “I’m as much of a stranger here as you are, Ben”⁴¹ and “These aren’t my memories, Ben. All the stories about this place are hers. The same recycled anecdotes, the fantastical myths with no foothold in reality. None of them are mine. I have to look really hard to see where the edges are.”⁴² But in a later dialogue with Ben she objects to his suggestion that she should return to her mother’s deathbed as soon as possible: “What if Cape Town is where she wants me. ... Then explain why I’ve never felt closer to her than when I’m walking through the District, on my own. Or when I hear the noon gun, or the call to prayer in the morning. Everything in this place is starting to feel like a piece of her.”⁴³ She develops this affinity even while being confronted with many silences as her mother “rarely talks about any of that. She rarely talks about the things she lost.”⁴⁴ In a similar vein, in the opening scenes of *Cissie*, Sara’s quest of “remembering” takes place in a twilight zone between day and night, against the vast expanse of District Six. As she “feel[s] [her] feet walk and pick out a path [she has] no map for,”⁴⁵ she recalls:

38 Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” 98.

39 Amy Jephtha, *All Who Pass*, 6.

40 *Ibid.*, 7.

41 *Ibid.*, 11.

42 *Ibid.*, 29.

43 *Ibid.*, 52.

44 *Ibid.*, 65.

45 Nadia Davids, *Cissie: The Playscript*, 15. This reference to embodied memory representing one’s exploration of the place through walking and feeling is echoed by Nadira’s

That stretch of road –
 I remember passing it
 when I was very young
 (always on the way to town)
 and whispering to my mother
 in an undertone
 that it would make a lovely playground
 ...
 My mother was quiet
 her gaze trained forward
 her face a tight profile⁴⁶

But, years after, the mother's melancholic silence becomes a departure point for the daughter in her post-memorial exploration. Thus, both plays, while staging solidarity through embodied and located encounters between mothers and daughters, along the lines of Hirsch's description of feminist postmemory, "d[o] not absorb the other, but grant the pastness and the irretrievability of the past, the irreducibility of the other, the untranslatability of the story of trauma."⁴⁷

4 New Practices of Politicisation: Dialogues of Situated Resistance

In my reading of the plays, so far, I have stressed the moments of juxtaposition without assimilation – between different "placed" practices of resistance and different types of "situated" (gendered, raced) knowledge. In what follows, I will argue that postmemory which works through such juxtapositions involves new forms of politicisation through reanimations of the archive. Looking at the history of reclaiming District Six in theatre productions, we can trace different types of representation and remembering which reflect particular politics of societal engagement. The famous *District Six – The Musical* (1987) by Taliep Petersen and David Kramer is an example of what can be called a vindicatory mode: the major thrust behind this powerful performance that re-created an affective community was to defy representations of the District as a slum and a place of crime, and to re-assert it as a place of humanity. It did so by, among

experience in *All Who Pass*, when she states at the beginning that she does not know the place since "the ground doesn't know [her] feet." Amy Jephta, *All Who Pass*, 7.

46 Nadia Davids, *Cissie: The Playscript*, 13.

47 Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," 99.

other means, rehabilitating the figure of the gangster and cultivating pride in being “local”; however, the performance itself did not raise any questions regarding the ethics and politics of recollecting life in District Six during the 1960s during the politically tense moment of the late 1980s. Debunking apartheid myths and setting record straight became, then, a leading impetus during the 1990s, involving reconstruction and recuperation of “forgotten” histories.

Dauids’ play captures this moment by including Sara’s oral history project of recovering the figure of Cissie in 1993 (the project the author herself undertook as a high-school student). In her later reflection on the play and its reception, Dauids critiques her biographical method which through the representation of Sara’s archival effort inflected the performance with an idea of restoring a “truth” (even though the author tried to avoid it).⁴⁸ She based her newer version of the play on the interviews from 1993 being performed as an archive while neither Cissie nor Sara appear on the scene. Thus, the interviews serve not as a key to a story to be re-created, but as a story in its own right, the whole performance becoming a process of remembering the memories of Cissie by those who knew her as well as those who only heard of her (the latter group staging the process of postmemory). *All Who Pass* involves a similar consciousness of memory’s situatedness. The play, similarly to *Cissie*, recalls the moment of intensified struggle and transition already in its title: as the audience enters the theatre, they see a projection of the plaque from St. Mark’s Anglican Church, one of the remaining buildings in District Six, with an inscription dated 1989:

ALL WHO PASS: Remember the thousands of people who lived for generations in District Six and were forced by law to leave their homes because of the colour of their skins. Remember St. Mark’s Church and the community who resisted the destruction of District Six.

Hands Off District Six Campaign, 11.2.1989⁴⁹

This invocation of a document from the time of radical resistance to the annihilation of District Six and its memory – supported by the two epigraphs to the play, with quotes from Czeslaw Milosz’ and Don Mattera’s⁵⁰ poems, dated 1974

48 Nadia Davids, “This Woman is Not for Burning,” 253–276.

49 Amy Jephta, *All Who Pass*, 3.

50 Czeslaw Milosz, a Polish exiled writer who lived and worked in France and the USA since the 1950s, is considered among most important Eastern European dissidents. Don Mattera was a prominent anti-apartheid activist, journalist and writer, much of whose work focused on preserving and engaging the memory living in multicultural communities in South Africa.

and 1987 respectively – is akin to the role of Sara’s interviews. Towards the end of the play, Nadira meets Salim’s mother, Rayda, in her fifties, when she enters the new house, accusing its young inhabitants of stealing it from the real owners. Rayda’s timeline of 1995, when she together with many others expected their houses in District Six to be rebuilt, intersecting with Nadira’s present, is another reminder of discourses and practices of community-based resistance from the 1980-early 1990s transitional period.

Thus, in both plays the representations of archival practices from the late 1980s – early 1990s serve as a “bridge” connecting the struggles for ownership and belonging during the time of District Six (as it existed up to the 1970s) and nowadays. These “bridging” representations invoke the moment of politicisation, heightened hopes and revisionism; the moment when an activist discourse was developed with its celebratory practices of remembering (casting Cissie as Joan of Arc) which later morphed into discourses of disillusionment (Cissie as an authoritarian).⁵¹ It establishes a dialogue between the contemporary moment, with its disillusionments and renewed struggles for restitution engaging the spaces of Cape Town city centre, and the earlier struggles at the hand of an oppressive regime. This connection created also through the autobiographical characters and their memory of the past raises questions of how resistance today should be similar to or different from yesterday.

Cissie, particularly its later version, reflects on the problems of biographical recuperation. *All Who Pass* ruminates on the difficulties of returning and repairing, by representing how the displacement has scarred or destroyed the lives of the older generation and how much effort it will take to repair the damage and get over the loss. A similar feeling that comes with “knowing the place” is invoked in the last stanzas of Sara’s final monologue:

I turn to the sea
and watch the ships pass
Turn from the place I know now
Is the Architecture of Loss.⁵²

But the knowledge gained produces more than an experience of loss; it invokes hopeful anticipation and a sense of new engagement that takes more self-reflective and embodied forms. Nadira’s reclaiming of the new/old house through a newly built connection with her mother serves as a metaphor of her re-gaining of herself and developing a new agency in her relationship with Ben. Sara, in her discovery of Cissie, starts seeing political activism as a deeply

51 Nadia Davids, “This Woman is Not for Burning,” 260.

52 Amy Jephtha, *All Who Pass*, 62.

gendered matter: she comes to perceive Cissie's entire life as an embodiment of her political principles and her fight with the regime as a "a corporeal struggle."⁵³ This politicised engagement is facilitated by the work of postmemory that functions as a vehicle for transcending historical revisionism by staging inheritance and "homecoming" as a fraught, but open-ended and thus promising process.

5 Memory as "a Space of Reckoning"

In the above discussion of *Cissie* (together with the author's reflection on the play's revised version) and *All Who Pass* – as two recent examples of symbolic reclaiming of District Six as a space for remembering – I hope to have demonstrated how their practices of postmemory facilitate new methodologies of historical representation through performance. I have argued that these practices convey meanings beyond restoration of a (mythologised) past, which some representations of District Six have been criticised for;⁵⁴ that they embark on *reanimating* family and community archives, to use Van Alphen's term, by engaging practices of resistance from the past in their critiques of the political present. In the South African context, this political present involves the accelerating processes of spatial and social inequality in Cape Town, among other urban centres. Among the methods of historiographical representation that are central to both plays, the chapter discussed their employment of District Six photography within the performative acts of "watching" which make the audiences reconstruct, re-imagine and relate to the injuries experienced by the inhabitants. Further, it argued that the acts of feminist postmemory explicitly staged in these plays foreground situatedness and encourage intersectional and translation-based approaches to understanding and interrelating past and present struggles of women in (post)colonial contexts.

In a similar vein, the plays intersect present-day archival engagements and the approaches that were practiced during the period of intense resistance and the transition. Without assimilating earlier experience and practice into the contemporary, they put the two in a dialogue, which can lead to revisions. By representing the story of Cissie through the ways she was/is remembered by other District Six inhabitants (thus, stressing their situated visions and agency)

53 Nadia Davids, "This Woman is Not for Burning," 273.

54 Richard Rive, "District Six: Fact and Fiction," in *The Struggle for District Six Past and Present*, ed. Shamil Jeppie and Crain Soudien (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990), 110–116.

and by including the voices of Farooz and Rayda as connecting to those of the community and Hands Off District Six activists, the plays “remember” them and grant them a due place in the present.

An important aspect of both plays’ performances of (post)memory, as my reading has indicated, is their embodied character (the knowledge of/belonging to a place is articulated in terms of bodily memory; memory is preserved and transmitted through material objects like maps created out of eviction notices; social knowledge and memory are circumscribed by gendered and raced bodies). Together with these practices of embodiment, elements of magic and imaginative transformation (transformation of Sara into Cissie and time travelling, intersection of timelines and stories of jinns) play a key role in forging new imaginations of the past. According to Yvette Hutchison, “[t]he non-realistic form is important as a methodology for interrogating an historical narrative, as it highlights the potential for multiple readings of the narratives, and thus highlights rather than obfuscates the ambiguities associated with historiography.”⁵⁵ It also links to Fleishman’s theorisation of remembering in the postcolony as “putting together of the fractured body” and requiring forms of fragmentation and assemblage for reconstructing and re-engaging a sense of the past.⁵⁶

As I was finalising this chapter, I got the chance to see the European premiere of Davids’ most recent play, *What Remains*, which was presented and opened to a public discussion in Amsterdam and Rotterdam by Amy Jephta. The play, based on the story of the Prestwich Place, centres upon the conflict between an archaeologist and a representative of the District Six community – which are figurations of the clash between “scientific research” and “social accountability,” “development” and “memory.”⁵⁷ It certainly deserves a separate discussion, but an important aspect to observe within this reading is that it further activates and intensifies the practices of memory and methodologies of representing the past that this chapter has discussed in relation to the earlier plays. To mention a few, the play continues activating photographic images (now projected on the scene), representing memory as embodied practice (through the centrality of dance in the performance) and stressing

55 Yvette Hutchison, *South African Performance and Archives of Memory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2013), 185.

56 Mark Fleishman, “Cargo: Staging Slavery at the Cape,” 8.

57 Nick Shepherd and Christian Ernsten, “The World Below: Post-Apartheid Urban Imaginaries and the Bones of the Prestwich Street Dead,” in *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-Apartheid City*, ed. Noëleen Murray, Nick Shepherd and Martin Hall (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 221–224.

the importance of indigenous knowledge (through the role of imagination and affect in the plot and performance). The centrality of the figure of a young descendent of District Six inhabitants as the narrator and her role in the final scene, representing her ability to revolt against the ongoing social injustice by virtue of sensing the experience and inheriting the memory of past generations, speaks to the very recent histories of the 2015–16 student protests against colonial practices of education and the 2017 “Reclaim the City” campaign against spatial segregation in Cape Town. This confirms the politicising function of the new methodologies of relating memory, identity and place described in this chapter.

It is this change in perspectives and methods of remembering and representing that Davids speaks about in her reflection on her practice:

The contemporary political landscape of South Africa is so full of immediate urgency that the question of revisionism itself has changed: it is no longer about the importance of recognising those who have come before for their own sake (remembering the dead, after all, serves no one but the living), but rather finding ways in which we can place them in conversation with the present.⁵⁸

In this context, the politics of memory becomes that of critical intervention into the historical injustices of the present – “brokering a dialogue between then and now, between past struggles and present failures [...] then we could use performance as not just a means of exploring identity, active memorialisation and historicising, but also, crucially, as a space of reckoning.”⁵⁹

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58 Nadia Davids, “This Woman is Not for Burning,” 273.

59 *Ibid.*

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