

## Re-membering and Re-directing the Self: An Educational Journey<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper draws on the notion of “productive remembering” (Huysen, 2003) which foregrounds how working with our memories of the past assist in the construction, interpretation and understandings of our present and our future trajectories. Instead of the use of literary texts, spaces and artifacts of our lived world, this paper draws on how personal experiences of persons, places and moments conjure up our “personal educational philosophy” within broader changing macro-landscapes. The paper explores specifically how educational philosophies, values and principles come to infuse themselves from our memories into our lived practices as teachers and researchers. The paper uses a self-reflective narrative inquiry methodology, now popularised as a strategy for teacher professional and personal development. It points to how the researcher drew from the influences of home, family, community, schooling and the wider society to activate a personal philosophy of education as a form of professional growth and as an educational responsibility. The paper explores the encounter with the Turkish Hizmet philosophy and draws comparisons with other movements of service to humanity, for example, Ubuntu and the deliberative action of nation building. The paper argues for an expanding agenda of self, as part the self in dialogue with many other selves. The educated self is not limited to a private, internalised, independent and cognitivist remembering, but an intersection of our personal biographical and contextual social past and present experiences intermingling in who we are and become in the future.

### Introduction

The multiple sites for conducting memory work are rich and varied: *whole communities*, intersecting a historical trajectory of shifts and redirections of relationships between employers and employees (Wells, 2014); a *museum* aiming to curate a post-apartheid reinterpretation of history (Ralo, 2014); a review of *sculptural memorialisation* marking a national conception of historical and political systems (Makombe, 2014); *children’s stories* of HIV, AIDS, illness and death (Madondo, 2014). This growing field

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of interests could broadly be assembled under the label of “cultural studies” in which a variety of objects, artifacts, literary genres, performance and visual representations, memorabilia, souvenirs, or similar “texts” could be interpreted, constructed, and deconstructed. Huysen’s (2003, p.7) analysis suggests this activity could be regarded as a form of “collective imaginaries”, interpreting how a dialogue between our present and past are formulated not just as individuals, but as part of communal re-creations through a reading and re-reading of cultural texts, including architecture and or multiple art forms. In his readings of the architectural and literary worlds of three cities, Berlin, New York and Buenos Aires, he acknowledges the constitutive tensions between the past and the present, in dialogical embattlements as they aim to reclaim their sense of history, and project future directives. The links between memory (how we chose to remember) and history (how we recall the events and influences) are not about the past, but also about our future.

Huysen’s “productive remembering” could be directed in a parallel endeavour, to how individuals (influenced by who, what, when and where they are situated - their located-ness) choose to look at their experiences in order to make productive directions for the future. The recollections and memory work within the field of life history research is capable of activating positive reconfiguring and redirecting of the self. It has become increasingly used as a form of teacher professional self-development strategy (Strong-Wilson, Mitchell, Allnutt & Pithouse-Morgan, 2013). This might arguably be a kind of realisation of one’s fuller capabilities (Nuusbaum, 2011). The educated self is one which embraces as many dimensions of the past, present and future.

This paper chooses *the self* as a site for similar kind of memory work showing how interpretations and readings of our past serve as a strategy for reviewing and synthesising one’s philosophy of life drawing specifically from the unique life history of the individual (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). In particular, it will focus on my emergent educational philosophy as a teacher, lecturer and researcher using my personal life history narrative accounts as a form of outlining this development. The self, its range of sources of influence and manifestations, is a site for re-constructing and re-examining through the narrative process. The paper draws on the tradition of teacher professional identity research (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Özdalga, 2003), life history research and narrative inquiry (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009) which argues for the creation of narrative representations to capture the complexity of being and becoming a teacher professional. It accentuates the tradition of self-reflective narrative inquiry (Pithouse, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2009) foregrounding the need to make explicit the heritages of philosophical and experiential resources that teachers carry with them in their professional journeys and their shifting selves during this growth trajectory (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Van Veen, Slegers & van de Ven, 2005). Clandinin & Connelly (2000) argue that we live “storied lives” and this richness of the lived world can be captured in the nuances of a narrative where the story-teller makes explicit the intersection of the varieties of forces influencing the strain of action and reflection as professionals. Within the field

of education research, and teacher professional development, the act of telling the story could be conducted by the participant himself or herself, or in dialogue with an external “re-researcher”. In both cases, it constitutes an activity of re-membering, re-assembling the component parts, re-configuring the relationships between persons, places, moments and events which have helped shape the kind of personal and professional worldview of the participants. Whilst this act might be considered a means of developing heightened self-awareness of a professional, it may also be argued to be the very journey which the endeavour of education pursues: the journey of self and social relations.

Learning a philosophy of life is an insidious and often unconscious process of infusion. We vicariously imbibe sets of values and beliefs about codes of conduct, rules of engagement, habits, rituals and routines that become what we believe to be our own unique make-up: our essence of *being*. Like argued by Huyssen (2003), these representations are neither fixed, nor independent of our contexts. They are not narrowly understood as a reified internal natural compass, sometimes referred to as our character trait, our identity (Korthagen, 2004), but instead are productive attempts to make meaning and reading of our lived worlds. The self is never a bounded entity; instead it is ever in dialogue with other selves, as ever evolving and mutating, with porous and fluid boundaries.

The process of constructing this personal narrative reflection of professional philosophy entailed the assemblage of specific *kinship-grams*, outlining the significant persons, whom I presently consider to be influential figures shaping my personal worldviews and values (Chang, 2008). The initial narrative emplotting was then re-assembled through identifying *other related beings* who were connected around these shaping kindreds. Identified *key shaping moments, critical incidents or momentum points* (Leinbach & Jenkins, 2008) were then chosen to reflect an embodiment of the influence and values that were learnt from these individuals at particular times and spaces. In recalling the events, attention was paid to presenting a visual textual remembering, identifying *key objects or artefacts* or environmental cues from within these moments. The assemblage of the narrative was then sequenced as a chronological journey of an early history of my professional learning, not necessarily only during the process of my formal education. Instead it starts with my journeys of learning from within my home, family, community, school, church and later on formal education, as a student, as a teacher, and later a higher education lecturer/researcher. This journey was also read against key shaping *documents I had written* during my stance as teacher, lecturer and researcher.

The philosophical understanding of education as service, a service to humanity, a movement away from selfishness to selflessness has penetrated my life over different periods of my growth. The dialogue between self and society is the subject of this paper.

The narrative record is divided into two sections: my personal journeys of self; and the societal landscapes of (some national and international) philosophies within a changing post-apartheid South Africa. In concert, it produces interpretations of the roles and functions of schooling and the educational extending of self. This paper is

a self-reflective narrative life history exercise which is not intended as a vainglorious celebration of my own story: instead it is used to make explicit the implicit opportunities for continuity and disruption that expands the growing sense of professional self and the role of the educational researcher. In his book, the “Present pasts”, Huyssen (2003) argues that this reflective process is not absolved from specific agendas of remembering. This is reiterated in the “Handbook on Narrative Inquiry” by Clandinin (2007). We ascribe and reclaim particular memories, and choose to remember them in different ways because of the present purposes and circumstances within which we interpret our present worlds. This suggests that the possibility that our experienced and remembered worlds will always be rewritten and re-interpreted (even by us as “storyteller”) (Clandinin, 2007). There is no singularity of self embodied for all time. The very rationale of education might be arguably to reach this heightened awareness of self and society.

In fact a singularity of self is itself scrutinised. The paper argues for an expanding agenda of self: the self in dialogue with many other selves, even within one’s own being. We cannot therefore talk of singularities of beings, only pluralities of negotiated identities as we embrace and re-negotiate our spaces within our diverse and complex society. It should be remembered that this re-writing of my memory and life history in narrative form is located at a particular point in the re-writing of what is understood to be grand narratives of the historical past, which were largely reported as oppressive and coercive. These narratives therefore constitute my view of a response to the master narratives previously imposed by apartheid censure. The small nuances of educational resilience, and operationalising of the development of deep philosophical counterpoints to the apartheid caricatures, as cultivated within my home, family, my community and schooling, are captured in these stories. We productively remember ourselves forward (Huyssen, 2003).

The second section of this paper reviews choice-making set against this backdrop of the shifting terrain of political and social reconstruction of the apartheid South African context, and its journey out of the apartheid shackles. More explicit philosophies of *Ubuntu* (South Africa) and later *Hizmet* (Turkey) came to take more forcible presence in my journeys of becoming. I therefore suggest that the backgrounds of our past fuses into the choices for the future aspirations: our foregrounds (Skovmose, 2008). Character development, for me is the dialogue between the inner self, the communal context and the prospective interpretation of our journeys of being and becoming: infusing our past, present and future; our heritage, our situatedness and our prospects.

## **Section one: my journeys of self**

### ***Becoming***

Perhaps the term “philosophy” conjures an overly abstract and obscure connotation. My early philosophers imparting my personal values, beliefs and values were not of this ilk. They were humble ordinary everyday folk who chose to live their lives as an example to others. I start with the assembly of family members in our household who were each

diverse in their perspectives, opinions and methods of representation of self.

My father was a dedicated teacher and a devoted manager of activism in the teacher union movement and sporting administration. From as far back as I can remember, our supper room table was (and still is) a discursive space for argumentation, debate and conversation. Whether we were talking about the day's activities, the problems with schooling (both as learners and teachers), or the social and political system, each member was encouraged to lead an argument and could hold the floor until our logic collapsed. To this day, these household meetings elect a chair to "preside over proceedings" – otherwise the feisty spirits would simply dominate. It is interesting that the chairs were not necessarily the older members- each one had turn to sanction and promote their agenda. We learnt the hallmarks of democracy and counter argument, logic and rhetoric without these labels. Interestingly, we were even given the vote to decide how to resolve a dispute. Also we were taught that the youngest always had preference to make selections of the first chocolate out of the box- something we even argued about. My mother held pragmatic sway over many of the decision-making: she was given veto votes when disputes arose. Our family parliament constructed notions of deep learning about recognition of difference, marginalisation and hierarchies.

I am not surprised that each of us chose widely divergent careers: some following in the footsteps of mum or dad, as primary or secondary school teachers; others, as administrators within the education system; others, as performing artists; yet another, as a re-casted analytical chemist who became an advocate engaged with investigation and prosecution of white collar criminals. However, our love for education permeates all our careers. This heritage spans at least four generations and has come to be documented in a biographical historical account of a hundred years of our family history in 2007, when my father, an uncle, an aunt and I chose to tell the life history of the family as we trajected from our roots in India, and made our mark on the emerging South African society (Samuel, Samuel, Rajah & Samuel, 2007). We are proud to have had a congratulatory message on the publication of the book from Nelson Mandela himself, for the contribution our family has made at many levels of the education system over time.

My journey of philosophy was thus incubated in the kinds of ways in which family relationships are nurtured, in the respect for the value of dialogue and argument, in the keenness of fairness and justice. A lived enactment of this service agenda is epitomised in the choice my father made to support my mother when over a short period of two or three years, she progressively was incapacitated due to growing blindness. From being a productive early primary school teacher and independent home-maker, to the one who needed physical and mental support, was a big transition for her. My father resigned from his job as principal to be at her side, sacrificing his career to aid her. Today, at over 80 my dad still continues to be an active member serving the educational community, continuing to study and write reflections on his career as an activist, as a family member. His recent book now focuses on the quest for non-violence in a comparative study of Luthuli, Gandhi and Mandela: super heroes who cut their teeth for reconciliation and peace-building on

South African soil. His thirst for formal education is reflected in his enrolment just two years ago in an Investment Analysis & Portfolio Management course with UNISA, to supplement his advisory role to teacher union structures, which he helped found as its first treasurer of the country's largest democratic teacher union.

Our circle of influence extended into the kinds of priestly clerical service that we encountered in our local small town Catholic parish community. We were blessed with a number of priests (mainly Irish) who served as missionaries who influenced the shifts towards countering the normative apartheid fragmentation of race and privilege. No doubt their influences were being derived from their own home country's quest for freedom, and /or the inspiration of Archbishop Dennis Hurley, our local evangelical Che' Guevara (Kearney, 2009). The textual influences floated into and out of my life rendering important opportunities for life's lessons, for argument and contested discourse. Our home was often visited by these priests who shared their interpretation of theology and a dedication, not through proselyting and sermonising, but through demonstration of their reaching out to the community, into their lives, into their homes, into their challenges. Their simple fellowship of shared meals and exciting car trips, with a loadful of children pursuing some youthful church or inter-church event, inspired a sense of commitment, community and duty. We grew up in a strange mixture of a single racialised formal public schooling, and a conglomeration of multiple races in the church religious education classes, in the church choir or in the church youth club, led by many members of the Samuel family who were all teachers. On reflection, it was noteworthy that our priests encouraged the youth activities of our parish to span across different faiths, different religions since the youth club activities perhaps posed the only outlet for young people in a small town. We could not live our lives only singularly, but also plurally.

In particular, we were privileged during our teenage years to be served by one particular saintly influence: Father Garth Michelson- who jokingly introduced himself as hailing from the States. He meant the "Orange Free State", which was the heart of the Afrikaner conservatism, which as an apartheid province did not even allow people of Indian descent to reside overnight within its juristic boundaries. His quest for justice and respect for diversity simply astounded me: he could quite easily find respect amongst a diverse set of religious communities, being able to attend mosque services on Friday, celebrate a Sunday morning Catholic Church mass, and join together with the Hindu Divine Life society on Sunday evenings.

Our relatively silo-ed upbringing of Catholicism viewed this behavior at a distance, and only now, I realise that we could have learnt so much more had we accompanied him on these dialogues with others in their varied worship services. His dedication to different racial communities earned him the title *Msizi* ("the one who supports") by the local African community. His breadth of knowledge across different religious groups encouraged us to understand (not only abstractly) the commonality across all religious formulations, aiming to deepen our knowledge of self, our knowledge of service to others and above all our respect for the Creator.

A memorable incident was his mild chastisement of our family senior members about disputes around the burial procedures of my grand-aunt who had married a Muslim; her married family's choice was to bury her in a Muslim ritualistic way. Fr. Michelson chose to be a representative at her Muslim burial when our family members could not bring themselves to attend. I had the fortune of continued relationship with Fr. Michelson well into my adulthood when he would continue to visit my home to sit and discuss his engagement with a doctrinal campaign for inter-religious dialogue within the Vatican in Rome. My interests in matters theological and scriptural were probably deepened by his calmness and deep insight into the need for humility and respect of all humanity, the need to open up spaces for dialogue across different race groups, different religious groups. His humble blue van which transported him into the far flung reaches of individual's hearts and homes, is a reminder that the journey does not need to be a comfortable one. It was not surprising that only after few encounters with Fr. Michelson that he was able to inspire people to redirect their lives and commitments. It is evident that I am a culmination of both my past, and the ideals we aspired for as the future. It is ironic that Fr. Michelson was born an Afrikaner, but professed everything antithetical to what I was officially told Afrikaners represented as apartheid oppressors.

### ***Being a teacher***

During my development as a teacher, I chose to infuse some of the principles I had learnt from my home, religious and broader educational community. I interpreted my role as being tasked with the responsibility of recognising the potential of all whom we meet, to engage with the belief in their inherent goodness, belief in the goodwill of others. I recall the tension of exploring this concept formally within my English literature classes, as we engaged with the study of William Golding's "*Lord of the Flies*" who believed, perhaps fatalistically, in the inherent evil in all humankind, where young boys resorted to a baser set of violence, torture and lording over others. Were they mimicking the wider warring society of their parents, the contextual landscape of the backdrop to the novel? The study of "*To Kill a Mockingbird*" by Harper Lee provided me the opportunity to examine how communal prejudice against individual and racial groups was a degradation of the human spirit. The setting of the narrative plot of the novel predating the outbreak of World War II masks the author's intended commentary more explicitly of its publication during the period of the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. The plot of the novel itself deals with the narrator's youthful quest to understand her father's defense of an American Black person charged with supposedly raping a White woman. My study with students of Shakespeare's "*Antony and Cleopatra*" provided useful opportunity to understand legal and political systems which embed cultural and philosophical opposing values. Who said literature study under apartheid schooling could not be radical?

I was assigned as a novice teacher, the responsibility of "managing" a group of technical boys studying woodwork and electrical work. Most teachers, including the learners themselves, had written them off as incapable of appreciating "the finer things in

life”, of appreciating literature and excelling academically. I chose to use DH Lawrence’s “*Sons and Lovers*” as a kind of courting manual for these boys who came to explore with me the intricacies of the relationship between a lustful/physical and a spiritual form of love. Besides becoming top performers in literature study, they also become the most sought-after “gentleman” the girls wanted to date! When they came to study Peter Shaffer’s “*Royal Hunt of the Sun*”, they easily identified with the tension of personal, political and religious ideals in a complex tension of opposites and choices of conquest and colonialism. I know little where these boys now are, but I am sure they have made meaningful contributions in their homes, their families, their workplaces. Was this the goal of education: creating productive thinking beings?

I then chose to become part of a founding school, which was set up to explore the possibilities of bringing different racial groups to live in community as an experiment and challenge to the apartheid system of separate education. This school, funded by large business co-operations, sponsored the possibilities for different learners from diverse racial, class and religious backgrounds to be co-educated in a residential school. This private schooling system had difficulty of being accepted originally, since many were skeptical of its relaxed ambience of learning, its non-use of formal school uniforms, its expansion of the curriculum to include community service activities within the neighbouring local population; its underplaying of adversarial competition; its recognition of the need for a balance between competence and caring; its self-help tendering for its school cleanliness and environment. This non-elitist curriculum went against the grain of other private schooling curricula. However, what it produced amongst its learners was a deep respect for self and others, for engaging in dialogue with the society who are less fortunate than oneself, the respect for a variety of linguistic and faith traditions. The Uthongathi School soon became a force to reckon with when learners themselves became advocates of its values, and they were campaigning the school’s message of respect more broadly.

The lessons I learnt from these public and private school communities were deep. I chose to broadcast this influence in the training of prospective teachers to share such broader vision through my choice to become part of a teacher education institution, which was dealing with its early stages of multilingual dialogues, as it admitted prospective teachers from beyond simply the Indian race group. My teacher education classes became formal opportunity to theorise and inspire future teachers to embrace multilingualism and multiculturalism in its plurality, as a resource for deeper philosophical, ideological and political reasons. This was the breeding ground for the future development of a prospective new democratic South Africa. Our experiences of the past learning and teaching can serve as leverage for the future.

### ***Becoming researcher***

The exposure to researchers from international communities in other developing countries, was an opportunity for further expansion of my own worldviews. I was



privileged to work with researchers, who were facing similar experiences of advocating a more just and respectful form of teacher education. Essentially, the models we were challenging were the imposition of a preferred set of expected teacher practices. We came to argue that it was an ill-treatment of student teachers to regard them as deficient, who had to be filled with our conceptions of the "correct wisdom". We explored how the journey to being teachers is about recognition of one's "best-loved self" (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005), the recognition that each of us has a heritage of positive and negative experiences of schooling, and that choosing the strategy that best suits one's own personal, social and political agenda, will endure sustainable deeper professionalism.

Teacher education is not a disguised form of evangelism to capitulate to external agenda, whether of the State or the teacher education institution. This entailed recognition of the rich heritage of biographical forces that our prospective teachers bring with them to our teacher education courses. Learning to become teacher was simultaneously about learning about one's self and one's choices for learning to service the development of our learning communities (Samuel, 2008). Even if one's own historical legacy was not paved with positive experiences, the classroom could become a space for a re-negotiation of the values of education, an opening up of the minds to the possibility of being other, more, and better. The possibility of being other, was what came to be researched in my next steps on my journey.

This included my foray into understanding the processes of marginalisation of learners in various schooling contexts in a national and international comparative study. We asked the question provocatively: who is the outcaste in schools; how is such marginalisation enacted and why? Our comparative research sponsored by the Department for International Development in the United Kingdom dealt with the intersecting factors of caste, class, religion, race and gender. The context of study included schools in both South Africa and India. Studies, following on this philosophical exploration, include Amin (2004) and Omar (2008).

My journey from family to teacher to researcher, was one which expanded my horizons both geographically and theoretically. I came to be involved in designing of teacher education policy to embrace the need for dialogue across the variety of stakeholders in setting up a national framework for teacher education (MCTE, 2005). These policy experiences are perhaps my own trajectory of seeing how inter-personal dialogue systemically is also a part of the democratic project of building ourselves, our communities and our nation. None of these dialogues are without tension, the need for arbitration and the existence of conflict. The emerging sense of becoming is thus infused with the dialogues of self and society.

### ***My formal introduction to Hizmet***

It was again Father Garth Michelson who introduced me to other philosophical strains in my journey of becoming (Michelson, 2010). His own openheartedness exposed him to encounters of an inter-faith movement that was being established within the city

of Durban within which I now resided. He had been part of the reflections with a school that was being set up by a group of Turkish educationalists. They were keen to see how the school could open its doors to the local community who were diverse in their religious and racial backgrounds. He introduced me to the founders of the school who were interested in the kinds of teacher education university courses which were being offered in South Africa. The school was interested in whether student teachers from Turkey could be educated in the South African school curriculum. When I first met with this group I was struck by their openness to want to learn about South Africa, even though they themselves were from outside its borders. The regional director of the movement which was helping set up the school was keen to place young Turkish students in the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the Faculty of Education at which I was now the Dean. The interests were to learn the intricacies of the South Africa curriculum. I soon encountered the cadre of nine Turkish students who enrolled to become teachers. I was intrigued by their commitment and choice of service to a country and community with which they had little historical connection. My research interests engaged in documenting the lives of these students, exposing myself to what informed their choices to become teachers, to choose at a tender age of eighteen to twenty to leave their own homes and country, to cross borders and serve in another land (Samuel, 2014).

Through them I came to learn of the Turkish *Hizmet* Movement which had inspired their lives. I came to hear of the philosophy of service to humanity, of commitment, dedication and inspiration they drew from their own teachers back home in Turkey who supported them to make life choices which expanded beyond selfish interests. They understood a deep commitment to offer themselves in the interests of a wider education. My study with these students' life histories exposed a deep connection with being and becoming: despite their relatively limited English language proficiency, they saw that through engagement with the local South African higher education context, they could learn to become of service to the South African community and society. Their role models of parents, teachers and leaders had done precisely that: to go into spaces where one's own vulnerability is cushioned by the support of camaraderie of fellow travelers who could support one's commitment to respect and love for learning and education. They revealed to me the kinds of philosophies that underpinned their life experiences and the inspiration of Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic scholar, activist and leader. They encapsulated for me the concept which the literatures they shared with me, around being a community of volunteers dedicated to the service of others (Gülen, 2004; 2009; 2010).

I then chose to further my interests in the Hizmet movement through reading and exposure to opportunities for deeper insight with a philosophy that seems to resonate with my own upbringing; my own sense of being that had been nurtured in a family, religious and communal context which was different from the strong Islamic heritage. The inspiration of writings by Fethullah Gülen became the backbone of this continuing journey (The Journalist Writers Foundation, 2014). I encountered his argument that the Hizmet Movement was not an evangelical disguised plot to convert the world to Islam (Ebaugh,

2010). He countered in his representations of Islam, an insight about a religion that was devoted to the pursuit of peace, despite the dominant images portrayed of militancy and violence associated with Muslim identity. His writings challenged whether many of those political organisations which promoted a militant Islamic image were indeed deeply consonant with the scriptural basis for their choices. He argued that the interpretation of a violence as a trait of Islamic life was misguided understandings of what a quest for inner purity and a war with a darker sinful-self entailed. *Jihad*, he argued was not a campaign of destruction of others opposed to one's worldviews, but an inner destruction of sinfulness (Çetin, 2011). As a Catholic, I heard strains of St Augustine's view of inner spiritual cleansing; I heard Gandhi's conception of selflessness; I heard strains of my family members' commitment to the opening up of the possibilities of self to the service of others. In the process of reclaiming old texts buried in the archives of history, came to be re-interpreted and re-valued (Huysen, 2003).

My understanding of the Hizmet movement was consolidated through cultural exchange visits to Turkey, in which I encountered the Hizmet philosophy in operation at various levels. Firstly, my interests were directed towards how schools following a Hizmet philosophy understood their curriculum goals. I encountered how this philosophy could be reinterpreted amongst small faith-based communities of shared support for teaching and learning amongst university or secondary students who lived in "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These nodes of inspiration were called "Houses of Light" led by a commitment to shared support of the aspirations of its members. I saw operations and attended meetings with groups of businessmen or city councilors who collectively pooled their human, physical and financial resources, to support the agendas of deeper respect for humanity. Their efforts spanned various social formations: women organising the development of a bursary scheme for indigent scholars through developing a communal kitchen selling home-made meals or selling handicrafts and artistic work; municipal officers campaigning the rights of housing and development agendas; construction workers and architects devoting voluntarily their physical and management skills to support the construction of school buildings; parents who embraced their co-responsible service to volunteer work within the school extra-tuition lessons. These exemplars over time I encountered re-iterated themselves in many different countries. In their sponsorship of these social formations, business were seen as not drawing attention to themselves as benefactors, but committed to the service to others. I saw how the media, in response to the silencing by oppressive regimes of propaganda, could harness communication networks to offer alternative visions of the society in which we live. I visited institutions of higher learning where whole institutes choose to infuse a Hizmet philosophical outlook on their kind of pedagogy.

Thereafter, my academic conference opportunities and management responsibilities provided a platform for exploring alternative visions beyond the habituated competitive spirit that is infiltrating our institutions of learning and education. I was fortunate to engage in the context of opening dialogues about how warring religious communities in

Nigeria could learn from each other. I spoke of peace education at a conference in New York, where I argued for a curriculum based on “small actions” of service to humanity, rather than large reforms which oftentimes are merely driven by symbolical rhetorical agendas. I shared my stories of the inspiration of the Turkish student teachers, and their life commitment at various forums, as an inspiration to rethink what educational commitment and care involved. Within the tradition of professional teacher development, the re-remembered self becomes a site for renewal, and professional growth, not just for the self, but for others too. Freeman (2007, p.121) argues:

“There are...cultures where human personhood is framed less in terms of an individual identity, with its unique and unrepeatably story of coming-to-be, than in the terms of its social place, its role in a cultural pattern that may be deemed timeless. Narrative remains a relevant category in such cultures but may be considered more a matter of public, rather than private, property.”

I thus interpreted rendering these personal narratives as a communal macro-responsibility, the property for a wider researching, reflecting audience. These reflections on my action are illustrative of the many different layers and levels of what education research, teaching and social commitment to service in society could entail. These experiences have been infused with critiques and commendations. Some argue that the realisation of alternative education and schooling system is a romanticised ideal for only a handful. I remind them that this educational philosophy is increasingly being sought after in contexts where the traditional models seem to be failing to produce deep commitment to the love of learning and knowledge (Robinson, 2011). Many are seeking alternatives to the pursuit of academic advancement as a triumph of self over others (Nussbaum, 2010, 2011). Instead more and more are accepting the need for co-operative dialogue between the inner self, and the responsibility and needs of the wider society (Sen, 1999). It is no surprise that the Hizmet Movement is finding root in countries across the globe as an alternative, not only as an Educational and Schooling alternative, but as a way of life for respect for peace and a dignity of all.

## **Section Two: Reconstructing South Africa post-apartheid: Ubuntu and the rainbow nation**

In this section I present the argument that philosophical movements span larger terrains and could inspire the direction of whole nations in their quest for a better quality of life. However, Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish 2006 Nobel Prize winner for Literature, in his 2008 interview with Andreas Huyssen (Pamuk, 2008) cautions that one needs to be aware of how collective forms of remembering problematically infuses our macro-worlds. Our chosen collective remembering strategies, he argued, are not absent from particular politicised truths that are attempting to become officialised. He suggested that the remembering can be corresponded with conscious forgetting. He was commenting on Huyssen’s probing on how the political landscape of present day Turkey influenced the

novelist's choices of subject matter and forms of reflections. Pamuk suggested that his choice to retell the forgotten stories of the past was a conscious decision to re-member, as a conscious act of reassigning into the public space that which had been silenced or marginalised. This entailed choosing different artifacts of the Turkish history, resurrected through forgotten artworks (literary words and visual pictures) to retell new stories. The challenge is how not to romanticise these texts on the periphery.

As a parallel, I choose to reflect on how the post-apartheid South African society has chosen to remember its horrendous past. Firstly, I draw on the inspiration of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's insistence that the reconstruction of the South African society post-apartheid needed to embrace elements of a restorative and healing agenda, rather than a purely legalistic pursuit of finding right and wrong. The forensic pursuit of truth to expose the horrors of the apartheid system, he argued would only foster greater division amongst perpetrators and victims of the violence and atrocities. In setting up the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Tutu argued that we need to find a way of telling our personal narratives of engagement with the defense of the past systems and the struggles for freedom from oppression. Above all, he believed this public telling would assist not to forget about the past, but to provide a second chance for a new beginning. "Forgiving is not forgetting", he argued. "And the remembering part is particularly important. Especially if you do not want to repeat what has happened" (TRC, 1998).

Of course, many still argue that this restorative agenda absolves the perpetrators of violence from accountability. The process of dealing with pain of torture, abuse or even killing is a long-term journey. It requires an openness of spirit to allow for healing and change. It becomes even more painful when systemic privileged subjugation of whole communities still coexists long after the TRC hearings. Reparations could be seen as a possible way of dealing the financial and physical consequences of the abuse. Some are even arguing that the new South Africa state did not fully embrace the recommendations of the TRC to deal with strategies for compensating victims (Ramphela, 2012; Mamdani, 2013).

Tutu inaugurated the term "the rainbow nation" to describe the South African society, to conjure up hope which is believed to be possible when we invoke our imaginative selves to extend beyond our present situatedness (however horrible) to ascend to aspirations of the future. We cannot sit back passively and expect that the new society will emerge because we will and want a community of shared communality. We have to work consciously towards recognition of the values that will bring about a new world order (Tutu & Tutu, 2010; Tutu, 2011).

One such hopeful option is to embrace the philosophical tradition of "Ubuntu" which many South Africans understand as the recognition of the interdependence that is required between individuals and their surrounds. "*I am because of you*" is one translation of a complex philosophy that chooses to acknowledge some of the following concerns: we are deeply connected and intertwined; we can grow when we recognise that everyone has a contribution of value to add to the quality of society we share; we are not interested

only in the absence of war or intolerance, but are active campaigners for the pursuit of peace; that the collective rather than the individual good is paramount (Waghid, 2005, 2012, 2014). This philosophical tradition is however, not unfettered from the possibility of romanticisation and /or mis-appropriation. In my endeavours as a researcher of the interpreted manifestations of Ubuntu, some concerning misalignments arise. Ubuntu is often misunderstood as a justification to draw individuals down to a common equaliser such that those who succeed above the ordinary are prevented from extending or being “different”. Ginwala (2011) argues that this is a false egalitarianism of mediocrity which prevents individuals from succeeding. We see this in schooling contexts where the successful learner, or out-of-the ordinary teacher is brought “down to size”. Ubuntu instead, is a celebration of self in dialogue with the community s/he serves. Another false interpretation of Ubuntu is a view that this “gift” of shared communalism is a heritage embedded in a natural order of being “African”. However, manifestations of similar philosophies span throughout the world: for example *Ayni* or *Minca* (Andes), *Marinaleda* (Spain), *Dugvad* (Norway), *Talkoot* (Finland), *Gotong royong* (Indonesia & Malaysia), *Bayanihan* (Philippines), *Meitheal* (Ireland). Variants of this philosophy are seen even within the African continent: *Harambe* (Kenya), and *Naffir* (Sudanese Arabic).

This exploration assisted me in my journey to acknowledge false conceptions of a primarily harmonious African singularity, and a perpetuation of the view that conceptions of conflict are only colonial importations (Bond, 2003). Embedded in the valuing of Ubuntu, was also a hidden agenda of a racialised African affirmation, and perhaps silencing of anything non-African. All societies contain elements of war and peace, conflict and dialogue, and Africa is no exception, either historically, or in the present. Many citizens, despite their legacy origins, call Africa their home presently. Yet, xenophobia is a seemingly pervasive characteristic of the effect of rampant nationalism. Our borders are patrolled by those fearful and guilty of marginalising the other.

The endemic quest for alternate rallying philosophies is perhaps a signal that war and intolerance have no winners; all are losers. Many countries internationally are seeking alternative ways of being and becoming. My truth making could not simply be a localised and personal quest; it had to be understood as also communal, regional and national. It is a simultaneous dialogue between past, present and future. It presents a responsibility that spans geographic and historical boundaries to venture out in the greater recognition of our humanness, our *polis*, our political being. I use the term “political” here to refer to the way in which we understand the power we have to enact representations of self within our wider social and state systems. Being “political” is about being respectful and communal, being local and universal, and is not confined to our racialised, gendered or circumscribed positions of nationhood, class, language and /or religion. This is a call to service of humanity, which is an English translation of the term “Hizmet”.

I came to understand that the journeys of self meanders through a tumultuous landscape. My earlier degrees of confidence about a hopeful society were being challenged. Narrative memory work entailed a confrontation of the multiple selves which

co-exist both internally, locally and in the macro-context. Memory work spans both time and space, geographically, culturally, historically and politically. We will need to constantly read and re-read our worlds as part of our educational journeys. My education of home, school and family was not sufficient until located within a wider macro-landscape, of changing political, social, economic and historical challenges. All of these stories were constantly being shaped and re-shaped and I too, had to read this landscape as part of my quest for professional growth.

## **Concluding thoughts**

The paper has argued that philosophy can be home grown with simple role models, through small actions. However, to activate and endure these influences one needs to constantly read and re-read the context within which one resides. This quest is for wider, deeper, more enduring valuing systems which span beyond the immediate and the expedient self. The Hizmet experience I believe, did not derive in my own journey from only my formal exposure to readings of Fethullah Gülen. Hizmet to me is not only an Islamic philosophy, but a wider campaign for social justice and quality education spanning nations and continents. A Hizmet philosophy is a universalist campaign for serving humanity through selfless action. The rewards for such journeying into its world offers a widening of our own self, a deepening of one's own commitment to schooling; a valuing of what a deep education can offer: after all education is a commitment of heart, mind and soul.

However, one needs to question the limits of this methodology of memory work and narrative inquiry which could be considered as a simplistic notion of a celebration of selves in dialogue with its society, as a strategy for professional growth and development. For example, Mamdani (2013) argues that we need to move beyond a TRC which focused on victims and perpetrators (and physical criminal violence) to activate a goal of exploring the *political injustices* in our society. The process of establishing a dialogue across our fragmenting society still remains more than a decade and a half into our new democracy. We need to question whether narrative research and our educational philosophies, such as Hizmet, can potentially remain idealistic rhetoric, if it does not tackle matters of systemic power, hierarchy and marginalisation. The rampant disease of corruption, weakening of civil society, the failure of economic management, the overt materialistic careerism and short-terminisms of political order begs the question of how we are to conduct ourselves as researchers, as educationalists and as philosophers in the schooling terrain.

Memory work must include multiple levels that are recognised to be constantly shifting: our sense of selves, our re-membered pasts; our aspirational futures. It cannot be divorced from the macro-contextual discourses of politicised, culturalised, habituating officialising narratives. We as researchers and educators are also implicated in creating new and alternative philosophies of seeing and reading the world: of self, of systems, of society, of history. These educated quests ought to be the very fabric we tailor when

we work as educationalists: in the home, the family, in schools, in classrooms, in lecture halls, in society. After all education is about leading forth a new direction for the self in society. Memory work is about chartering this direction in the internal, micro- and macro-context landscape. Our methodologies, our epistemologies and our representations in our research and educational activity are intertwined when offering such alternate philosophical possibilities. Our questioning educational philosophies must tackle deeply our systemic role as producers of the new society through the activities of our schooling. Our endeavour continues.

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