

Political Activism and Narrative Analysis: The Biographical Template and the Meat Pot

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Key words:

political activism,
narrative,
biographical
template, meals,
rituals, family and
generational
transmission, the
personal myth

Abstract: This article examines the autobiographical and some other writings of Mamphela RAMPHELE, a former political and community activist in South Africa with reference to forms of narrative analysis. It is argued that these writings can be viewed together and compared as autobiographical texts. This view raises a number of methodological issues concerning the degree of re-interpretation and other changes in the "retelling" of an account in different circumstances and form. The article compares this single case with models of "political activism" where individuals orientate their lives and activities towards various social goals. Here the attempt is to link and analyse the particular case within wider analyses of political activism. The article argues that in RAMPHELE's narrative telling and retelling certain events in terms of communal rituals and boundary crossings, she has utilised a "reflective biographical template" in her life which she both returned to and re-used as she met new challenges and situations.

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1. Introduction

In examining any material with a view to interpretation, or examining interpretation within other research, a variety of thoughts spring into the imagination: previous modes of interpretation that you or others have used, previous knowledge of the particular substantive field, possible theoretical considerations and approaches, and so on. Even so, reading a document—whether collected by you or someone else—always brings surprises arising in the encounter, and sometimes new methodological and theoretical insights. [1]

On examining the writings by RAMPHELE on her life and political activism I had the expectation that they would mirror a certain generic pattern—growing political awareness and a moment at which the identity of "activist" is cemented. To a certain extent the documents conform to that model, but as I will hope to show, a

more complex process can be demonstrated—with the RAMPHELE's experiences and past achievements of the past being applied in a specific manner in the present as continuing guides to action. [2]

It soon became apparent that the task of analysing some of her various writings—particularly her intended "autobiographical" (RAMPHELE, 1996) works the task was more difficult than I originally envisaged. A number of issues became apparent—not all of which I have been able to tackle fully: [3]

Political Activism: The choice of the term "political activism" brought an immediate difficulty regarding definition. Here the activism has to be examined within the particular setting of Apartheid and its aftermath in South Africa—the repression and cruelties of the system, the dangers of activism and the challenges in forming a new society. Generally, the term "political activism" has the connotation of a full time career in political campaigning and organisation. But, political activity, it can be argued, can take numerous forms not merely as actions taken by those who spend the most time debating, promulgating ideas and strategy-making for change. For instance, some of the actions of her older family members described by RAMPHELE in pushing against the constraints of Apartheid could be included under the banner. So, a definition of political activism could be too restrictive if simply reserved to those positing an alternative ideology and/or physical resistance. Instead, it should be extended—at least in the context of Apartheid (or other repressive regimes)—to cover a range from "mundane" non-compliance in daily life, to legal and civil challenge, and to more overt resistance. In this view, "political activism" is conceived as involving overlapping forms of consciousness and realisation—often in contradiction—some with a definable goal, organisation and clear commitment, others much less so. In terms of Mamphela RAMPHELE's life we can see political activism as a dedication, and a commitment to opening new possibilities and raising self-belief. But, from her background we can also see a pre-existing attitudes and actions within her family which challenged Apartheid but also other patriarchal and traditional structures. [4]

Political and Social Context: The autobiographical writings cannot be divorced from their social context and the public persona of RAMPHELE since it is produced at a profound moment in the political and social development of South Africa. Her life is very intimately connected with the societal changes in country: for example, in the previous eight years):

- 1990: Nelson MANDELA is released and the beginning of the end of Apartheid;
- 1991: RAMPHELE is made deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town and is awarded a PhD in Social Anthropology, co-writes/co-edits *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (PITYANA, RAMPHELE, MPUMLWANA & WILSON, 1992) (following meetings with Nelson MANDELA in prison 1988-90);
- 1994: Free Elections in S.A. and Nelson MANDELA elected President;

- 1995: RAMPHELE is chosen as vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town and her autobiography *A Life* is published in S.A. (2nd edit. 1996);
- 1996: her autobiography published in US as *Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader*;
- 1997: Steve BIKO's death examined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, S.A.;
- 1998: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report published in October;
- 1999: Second free elections, Nelson MANDELA retires as President, RAMPHELE leads integration in the University of Cape Town, and writes book on youth in post-apartheid S.A. (see HARLAN, 2000, pp.102-103). [5]

RAMPHELE has related her life account several times in various contexts, she has reflected deeply and at length upon it, and was aware of her life and its telling within the broader social setting. Whether intended or not her life account(s) is a political or social intervention—although some would argue the telling and reading of a life is a political act since it creates individual and other change. [6]

RAMPHELE has written about her life experiences within an article devoted to gender in *Bounds of Possibility* (1991) (RAMPHELE, 1992a), and gave her autobiography, *A Life* (1996).¹ A web search reveals a wide range of speeches and interviews giving her views on the development of South Africa and her own life. In addition, she had written extensively on labour migration and land issues. Thus, there are a number of autobiographical and other "texts": the extended published autobiography, interviews, speeches, articles and so on which bear upon her life and beliefs. There is a re-telling in these accounts and with it a certain explicit and implicit "intertextuality" as one text refers, draws on implicitly or implicitly, other "tellings". In such "tellings", the narrator remembers previous comparable situations and writings while "editing" for the current narration. When any life account is given there is a retrospectivity as the past is not simply cemented but is reflected upon—always with the possibility of new meanings arising from "new responses" due to re-emphasis and omission of experience. There is not the space in this article for general methodological discussion comparing interviews and self-written accounts in biographical research or, more specifically, even a very detailed examination of the contrasts between the various life accounts given by RAMPHELE. The focus will necessarily be more limited but will examine what can be regarded as an important theme "guiding" her life narrative. [7]

The next two sections consider a) what is narrative analysis? b) and, what are political narratives? [8]

1 The question of "giving voice" could be raised here, including the many issues for the researcher and the research relation: see PERKS and THOMPSON, 1998, Pt. III; RIESSMAN, 1993, p.8; see also REINHARZ, 1992, pp.138-141.

2. Narrative Analysis

In considering the use of narrative analysis the immediate problem arises in the application of terms. It is the case that "narrative", alongside other forms of biographical research has become very much a feature of the human sciences and applied fields. But, less clear is what "narrative" and "narrative analysis" entail (see CHAMBERLAYNE, BORNAT & WENGRAF, 2000; HINCHMAN & HINCHMAN, 1997; RIESSMAN, 1993; ROBERTS, 2002, Ch. 7). A common starting point in "narrative analysis" is usually the assumption that a life account (or part of it) has the features of a "story" or "plot". This starting point can lead to the search for confirmation of an underlying formal structure or merely that individuals "narrate" or tell their experiences, perhaps with some analytical identification of rhetorical (e.g. use of metaphor) or poetic elements. At its simplest, "narrative" may merely refer to giving an outline of some event, process or experience. If the analysis is focused more on the "structure" of the story, reproducing a form apparent in some other accounts, then there is the possibility that the individual uniqueness of experience becomes secondary to the analysis of generic characteristics. Some would argue that even if the "authenticity" and "plausibility" of the singular case is fronted, a single story cannot be divorced from the influences of wider genres of telling (e.g. romance, tragedy). [9]

Narrative analysis not only covers a wide range of procedures, it has also been informed by numerous interpretive or theoretical orientations (e.g. hermeneutics, existentialism, phenomenology and interactionism) (see POLKINGHORNE, 1988; LIEBLICH, TUVAL-MASIACH, & ZILBER, 1998; JOSSELSOON & LIEBLICH, 1993; MILLER, 2000; WENGRAF, 2001; RIESSMAN, 1993, 2002). Differences in interview procedure are evident and narrative analysis may be undertaken on a variety of pre-existing material perhaps collected for other purposes. In conjunction with the rising popularity of narrative research, doubts or tensions have been increasingly expressed, especially if "narrative" relates closely to "story telling". For example, if "narrative" means something much wider than the examination of the formal features of "story" does it merely indicate various types of "telling"? Are there "hidden", "secret narratives", "unvoiced" or "unconscious" narratives (see HOLLWAY & JEFFERSON, 2000)? Is the narrative "model" of analysis, if based on the notion of a single "story" as having a start, beginning, and end, ultimately wedded to a linear or chronological model of time, despite its attention to memory, and recollection? To what degree, if any, is the self really a "storied" construction? Does the model recognise the differentials between individuals' abilities to story their lives (STRAWSON, 2004; see BRUNER, 2002; EAKIN, 1999)? Do we express ourselves in many ways; is not story-telling about ourselves only one, albeit an important, mode relating our experiences amongst others? [10]

Again, there is not the space here to enter the detail of these debates, rather to use narrative analysis in a limited way. Two aspects of the autobiographical accounts by RAMPHELE seemed evident—firstly, the theme of "food" and,

secondly, more specifically, "meals".² LIEBLICH et al. (1998) make useful analytical distinction in narrative research along two dimensions: between holistic and categorical approaches (the whole or the part of a narrative as the focus), and between content and form (motives, images vs. structure form/coherence) approaches. The analysis adopted in this article begins with a focus on a part ("food"); this theme is then used as a means to understand the coherence of the whole account. The approach also has an initial attention to content—a particular event(s) ("meals") but then as providing a sense of structure or guide in the life in question. Simply put, the analysis moves from the specific to the general—from "part-content" to "holistic-structure" as a means to understand political activism and a life. Here, is not a search for poetic or metaphorical elements, a clear chronological base, the summary of the whole story, as in some narrative analysis, rather a view of a repeated theme that gives a source of continuity via retrospection and reapplication. Thus, the analysis is not a simple chronological reconstruction of the life but a conception of a "life" as backwards and forwards movement in time, always from the present. This will undertaken (later) by exploring the idea of the reflective "biographical template" as applied to certain aspects of RAMPHELE's autobiographical writings. [11]

3. Political Narratives

The notion of "political narrative" has been used in an increasing number of ways. For example, it has been taken as synonymous with "political discourse" or any individual story has been taken as a "political narrative" since all accounts of relationships reveal the power and domination. Some of the uses or overlaps with other areas have included: the political autobiography; political biography as including stories; forms of testimony and evidence, including accounts of repression and torture by victims and perpetrators (e.g. truth commissions); health, illness and injury narratives as political statements; historical political narratives. Further areas include: policy narratives; political psychology and narrative, ideology as narrative, analytic narratives to understand the political order; narrative journalism; oral histories of the "unheard", including women's histories; the political use of oral histories; political "talk" and speeches; political beliefs as narrative; and accounts of specific political fights and personal manifestos. [12]

Individual "stories" of struggle and achievement are found within many forms of biographical research often as part of a commitment which gives a "voice" to those previously "unheard" and repressed (ROBERTS, 2002, p.25). Such accounts can be a "significant resource for political groups and emergent social movements" such as: indigenous peoples, women's movements, ethnic communities, immigrant groups, working class communities, the disabled, trade unions, the women's movement, lesbian and gay groups, political campaigners, trade unionists and working class communities, survivors of sexual abuse,

2 ACKROYD's (2000) thematically organised approach to a "biography of London", a city that "defies chronology", "a labyrinth" in a "continual state of change"—rather than a more linear forward narrative, comes to mind as a possible model for analysing a life (ACKROYD, 2000, p.2).

communities facing economic disruption (PERKS & THOMSON, 1995, pp.184-185).³ [13]

Political narrative as "biography" is a very well established genre; politicians, campaigners and activists commonly give accounts of their lives and, their days in power or campaigning, in autobiographies (sometimes "ghosted") or even by publishing their diaries. There may be a number of reasons for publication: as a justification of past action, to leave an "historical record", enhance or restore reputation, as a role-model to others, as part of a campaign objective, to make money, to show another side of character or interests, show an inner struggle, and so on. RAMPHELE gives a number of reasons for writing her autobiography *A Life* (RAMPHELE, 1996, Preface) but, of course, the reasons for giving a "life account" can differ over time and context, and there may be both immediate and underlying reasons. [14]

RAMPHELE's autobiography and other writings outlining her own and others' achievements and struggles are very much part of the social and political context in South Africa and should be placed, as stated earlier, alongside her many other interviews and series of books on social conditions in the country. They could be seen as one means of "coming to terms" with the past via "re-telling". In fact, there are various ways victims and perpetrators of crime "narrate" past traumatic events and conflicts—testimony, confession, witness, accusation, commentary, pardon, which all can take more legalistic or quasi legal forms of presentation and context (see HODGKIN & RADSTONE, 2003, RADSTONE, 2000).⁴ RAMPHELE's *A Life* (1996) and her earlier writings appear to have at least some of these elements, such as witness and a commentary on events, contained within them which no doubt are a range of personal feelings on the past and expectations and hopes connected with the emerging new South Africa. [15]

The most obvious possible depiction of RAMPHELE's autobiographical writings as a narrative or biographical type is perhaps "testimonio" (BEVERLEY, 2000). Although, it can take various forms, including a transcribed interview, a testimonio is an account by a participant or witness who testifies to the truth of insufficiently reported events (e.g. repression, torture, dislocation, racism) for the purpose of social change (BEVERLEY, 2000, pp.540-541). The produced text recounts a full life or important experiences directly to the audience; the researcher, journalist or other "outsider", who is usually concerned with understanding a particular culture, and is "used" as an intermediary to make the testifiers account "available" (BEVERLEY, 2000, p.556). There is a difference posited, therefore, between a testimonio and a life or oral history as the narrator is not merely an informant but attempting to bring his or her position and that of a group to a societal recognition. The teller in a testimonio is giving an urgent communication detailing

3 See RAMPHELE's publications in the references: PITYANA et al. 1992; RAMPHELE, 1991; 1992a; 1992b; 1993; 1996; 1999; WILSON and RAMPHELE 1987; WILSON and RAMPHELE, 1988. RAMPHELE was also interviewed by Mary Marshall CLARK for the Oral History Archive, Columbia University.

4 See the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Report, 1999, also <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/index.html>. See also van MAANEN (1988) on forms of ethnographic reportage by a researcher.

an experience of exploitation, poverty or repression whereas the life history is collected by the researcher to gain insights into the culture of a community (BEVERLEY, 2000, p.556; TIERNEY, 2000, p.540). [16]

There is some sense of urgency in the RAMPHELE's writings, more so perhaps in her autobiography and earlier work, but it is in a pragmatic vein for principle informed action on issues such as education and equality in the light of the new social and political situation. Nevertheless, RAMPHELE's *A Life* (1996) and more "autobiographical" writing fit a "testimonio" model to the extent it is "an affirmation of the authority of personal experience". Perhaps unlike testimonio it does have a powerful sense of self-identity—and a conception of "identity"—which is not reducible in simple terms to the group or class experience that it relates (BEVERLEY, 2000, p.556). At a deeper level BEVERLEY's conclusion does seem relevant to RAMPHELE's life accounts:

"There is a question of agency here. What testimonio obliges us to confront is not only the subaltern as a (self-) represented victim, but also as the agent—in that very act of representation—of a transformative project that aspires to become hegemonic in its own right". (BEVERLEY, 2000, p.561) [17]

4. The Story (ies) of the Meat Pot

The personal and the political aspects of RAMPHELE's various life accounts initially appear to converge—life meanings are "condensed"—at certain key moments in her life. "The Story of the Meat" appears to be an important part of RAMPHELE's "political narrative".⁵ Two versions of it are given below; firstly, as found in her autobiography *A Life* (1996); and secondly, as part of an article on gender (1992a). Each "story of the meat pot" is "introduced" differently in terms of preceding questions, text and context. [18]

5 RAMPHELE's *A Life* (1996) and her other accounts may also be considered as one of the many forms of "autoethnography" (e.g. "reflexive ethnography") (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000). While there is some comparison her autobiographical writings are welded to a broader perspective of social change (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000).

THE STORY OF THE MEAT POT—Version 1:

Mamphela RAMPHELE (1996). *A Life*, 2nd edit.

The Story of the Meat Pot is introduced by vivid descriptions of her family; her parents and grandparents taking risks in departing from tradition moving outwards, a family heroes pushing to the boundaries of heir communities, and her mother's struggle with the patriarchal family system (RAMPHELE, 1996, pp.12-15).

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RAMPHELE describes the slaughtering of animals as the "holy of holies" since women were considered a pollution risk threatening the livestock's fertility. Men delayed slaughter until after darkness and further emphasizing their power by selecting and cooking the best pieces, leaving the women to cook the rest for themselves and children. Again, she describes the occasion her mother deciding a "critical boundary" had been crossed and then acting calmly in taking the tender cuts and distributing them. Her father was caught between loyalty to his stunned brothers and the argument of his wife act—and did not intervene. The other women were jubilant. The result was more cooperation with the slaughtering and cooking. RAMPHELE further praises her mother, including her domestic skills (especially, delicious cooking) and her other challenges to traditional practices. She adds that her father provided well and they were the best-fed children locally (RAMPHELE, 1996, p.19). Food appears once again in the story of the "appalling" food at boarding school and, later, her activist life on occasion disrupted the regular meals her body needed (RAMPHELE, 1996, pp.41, 69).

In this account the emphasis is on the transgression of boundaries that had produced a liberation for both women and men from an outdated practice (RAMPHELE, 1996, p.15). [19]

THE STORY OF THE MEAT POT—Version 2:

Mamphela RAMPHELE (1992a), "The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View", in B. PITYANA et al. *Bounds of Possibility*

In this article, written before her autobiography we see The Story of the Meat Pot transformed according to her experience of gender relations within political activism and communal health work.

The story is prefaced by comments on her learning to "survive in a male-dominated environment without falling prey to it" including standing up to male intimidation and to be "aggressive" to men in both social and political levels who undermined women. She began to see herself as "being different from other women" and becoming socialised into being "one of the boys" within activism—an "honorary male". But although taking part in late nights, alcohol consumption and smoking "the same men one socialised with took a dim view of women being seen doing the same things as them publicly, particularly smoking" (RAMPHELE, 1992a, p.218). Thus, there seemed a disjunction between "genuine comradeship" and sexism at many levels of activity, as in the assumption that women had the responsibility for catering and cleaning at workshops, conferences and so on. However, women activists also felt "uncomfortable" with change in "stereotypical gender roles" (RAMPHELE, 1992a, p.219).

The Story of the Meat Pot

The honorary male status brought certain advantages in terms of declining to meet demands to carry out domestic tasks during meetings, and breaking taboos giving deference to men over seating. Also, challenging the customs allowing men have the best portions of food, particularly meat even though women contributed to food costs. While at the Zanempilo Health Centre, as the medical officer in charge, she successfully confronted the men who objected to her presence in communal eating. She declared that they could leave the room but she insisted on her right to stay—they gave in (RAMPHELE, 1992a, p.220).

Here The Story of the Meat Pot has been "retold" within a different context as part of "a personal journey" (p.217) connected to the "issues for transformation" (pp.225-227) She concludes the article by perceiving "differentials in power" as an integral whole. Race, class and gender "form a mesh around both men and women, and constrain their capacity for transformative action"—those oppressed in "one way are likely to replicate unequal power relations among themselves" (RAMPHELE, 1992a, p.227). In this manner, the transgression of the meat pot story becomes remade or reapplied, firstly as a consciousness of the "bounds of possibility" and secondly, into the wider issue of transformation of unequal relations of power.⁶ [20]

⁶ It does not seem clear at what age RAMPHELE witnessed or was told of the event.

5. Meals and Rituals

At a mundane level it is not surprising that for a growing teenager and later a busy activist the question of food should be an important part of daily life. However, the importance of food in RAMPHELE's various autobiographical accounts (and other writing) frequently reoccurs and is worth pursuing further as a "motif" or theme within the narrative. Firstly, though, something must be said about the often-neglected socio-cultural role of food—its preparation and consumption—and its importance for social analysis:

"Ideas about the properties of food, its purity, its pollution, its dangers, its powers, its suitability or availability for given status groups, its preparation, and the occasions and rituals of its consumption, form a significant component of every culture".
(BEARDSWORTH & KEIL, 1990, p.139) [21]

The production, preparation and consumption of food also bears upon the social organisation of the household and the differences of class, gender and age in terms of "expression and reinforcement of divisions and power relations within the family" and community (BEARDSWORTH & KEIL, 1990, p.139; see CHARLES & KERR 1988; BEARDSWORTH & KEIL, 1996; FINNEGAN, 2002, p.178). [22]

Shared meals are a form of "regulated and communicative sociality" (FINNEGAN, 2002, p.178; see also COULIHAN & van ESTRİK, 1997). Meals within the family and celebratory communal functions are ritualistic in character. Rituals transmit differences as well as solidarities through a moral frame, which carries wider cultural and political features as well as interpersonal interaction. To challenge such rituals, in private or public is "risky" in terms of social position (shame, exclusion). [23]

The "meal" whether in daily practice or as a wider ceremonial occasion can be regarded as the community in microcosm. It relays the structuring of patriarchy, ethnicity and other divisions (e.g. age). Through the distribution of food and the timing and organisation of consumption "boundaries" of authority and legitimacy are drawn. To transgress the "rules" of the meal is also to challenge the rules governing private and public relations between groups. [24]

6. Family and Generational Transmission

RAMPHELE attributes much of her movement in "stretching across boundaries" (RAMPHELE, 1996, Ch. 8) to the examples set by her parents and grandparents ("family heroes") in pushing to the edge of communal boundaries or challenging tradition. Her connection to several generations of family members allowed a channel for important values, models of social relations, domestic skills, expectations and aspirations, social standing and lessons, "silences" to be culturally transmitted (see BERTAUX & THOMPSON, 1993, pp.1-2; ROBERTS, 2002, pp.144-147; ROSENTHAL, 1993, 1998). In giving a life story something of RAMPHELE's family history is also relayed:

"Telling one's own life story requires not only recounting directly remembered experience, but also drawing on information and stories transmitted across the generations, both about the years too early in childhood to remember, and also further back in time beyond one's own birth. Life stories are thus, in themselves, a form of transmission; but at the same time they often indicate in a broader sense what is passed down in families." (THOMPSON, 1993, p.13) [25]

The life account thus passes on, as Thompson argues, "family material and cultural capital" as part of the "mental map" of family members (THOMPSON, 1993, p.36). The family may be seen as an "intergenerational system of interlocking social and emotional relationships" and family stories as the "symbolic coinage of exchange between the generations, of family transmission". The individual life narrative is also in part a transmitter of collective family memory. In short, the analysis of life accounts within a family can demonstrate the models of action bequeathed to later generations that shape outlook and sense of possibilities (THOMPSON, 1993, p.19; see also MILLER, 2000, p.67, ROBERTS, 2002, p.145). [26]

7. The Personal Myth as a Reflective Biographical Template

Narrative accounts of life often contain metaphors or other rhetorical devices which "summarise" the life. Political narratives of life as a "sub-genre", in common with some other narratives, often analysed according to the idea of a path, journey, challenge or direction (see McADAMS, LIEBLICH & JOSSELSO, 2001). For example, RAMPHELE uses "a personal journey" and "daring to travel the risky path" (RAMPHELE, 1992a, pp.217, 222), while Nelson Mandela uses the "long walk to freedom" (MANDELA, 1995). The existence of traditional or common forms of narrative of individual life—political, religious, health, work career—alongside life models and "stories" derived from family members and immediate others, are also sources and frames for our own "story". [27]

Commonly, a feature of political narratives, and some others (e.g. health narratives) is a significant moment (or several moments) in life that brings a shift in life outlook, commitments and behaviour—that leads to taking the "hard road", etc. In religious narratives, perhaps the oldest and most influential narrative form we have, this equates to a life-changing moment of conversion to a faith. DENZIN describes these episodes as "turning points" or "epiphanies":

"Meaningful biographical experience occurs during turning-point interactional episodes. In these existentially problematic moments, human character is revealed and human lives are shaped, sometimes irrevocably". (DENZIN, 2001, p.145; see also DENZIN, 1989) [28]

DENZIN identifies four kinds of epiphanies; major ones, that have an immediate and long term effect on all aspects of the individual's life; cumulative, that are reactions to events that stretch back over a long period; illuminative, that are minor yet symbolically represent major difficulties in a relationship; and the relived, that have meanings attached in retrospection and through reliving the

events (DENZIN, 2001, pp, 145-146). It is attractive initially, to see The Story of the Meat Pot as a single "epiphany", or perhaps rather a combination of the cumulative (influences leading to the event) and the relived (as returned to point of identification). The notion of "personal myth", not as a story which is either true or false but instead as retold as a "reflective biographical template" guiding experience, could be considered here. The personal myth provides "meaning, unity and purpose" for a life (McADAMS, 1997, p.265) as a constructed resource which enables the individual to interpret current experience and anticipated events. It is a construction from the vantage of the present to meet current concerns and difficulties. As a guide to action it can join with other myths from family and community "history". The Story of the Meat Pot as a personal myth can be retold, renewed and applied through degrees of selection or editing and according to the new experiences and circumstance (see PENEFF; 1990; McADAMS, 1997; ROBERTS, 2002, pp.124-128; THOMPSON, 1993). [29]

8. Conclusion

The Story of the Meat Pot formed a "biographical, reflective life template"—a personal myth that was a referent for current action. It was not simply in the past, or as a past source of inspiration but developing with the present as a means not merely to challenge social conventions and oppressions but to cross or bridge social boundaries. When a social boundary was traversed (in home, community school, movement, communal activism, academic life and so on), as in RAMPHELE's life, the reflective, biographical template could be modified again, and reapplied. The next leap could be rehearsed, re-envisioned from the lessons of the preceding "meat pots", and then applied according to the nature of the immediate challenge. The boundary could be spanned first in mental preparation and then in "reality". This is not to say, for RAMPHELE, that the realisation of the "bounds of possibilities" and the "stretching across boundaries" was in any way simple or easy—as in the case of meals and food, the process of "preparation" had (a bearing on the outcome.⁷ [30]

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7 An interesting parallel with The Meat Pot Story is RAMPHELE's account of her paternal grandmother's "praise singing"—a practice that celebrates the extended family, its stories and heroes, and reminds members of their roots. Her grandmother also included female heroes and transformed "old tales" with contemporary "images and themes" (RAMPHELE, 1996, p.12). RAMPHELE's mother sang her praises at her inauguration as vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town.

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Citation

Roberts, Brian (2004). Political Activism and Narrative Analysis: The Biographical Template and the Meat Pot [30 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 5(3), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0403107>.

Revised 6/2008