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Political and Relational: Autobiographical Narrations of Latvian Women across Three Generations

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Some earliest memories are of a single, personal moment, yet the earliest memories of many Baltic women, particularly those born at or near times of political trauma and upheaval, are likely to be both highly political and highly relational. Not only are these earliest memories contextualized within very specific political-historical situations, but the autobiographical narrations are for women more concerned with the self in relation to others with whom one is closest.

Illustrative of such autobiographical narrations is that by Benita (all names have been changed for purposes of anonymity), a talented, well-educated, sympathetic woman who was born in 1943 in Rīga, Latvia, where she is now still living. I had the opportunity to interview her twice, in 1995 and again in 2000, and also to interview her mother, born in 1915, and her daughter, born in 1971. My initial analysis of their autobiographical narrations, which were focused upon their lived experience during the period of Soviet occupation, was with the intent to compare across generations their ideological positionings. The most striking aspect of the comparison was the ambivalent, shifting ideological stance expressed by Benita, in contrast to the much more consistent positionings of her mother and daughter. In order to attempt a better understanding of Benita's ambivalence, I delved more deeply into her autobiographical narrations; it became apparent how significant was the intertwining of the political and the relational within the narrative tapestry which she had created. It was during the first interview, when I asked about her earliest childhood memory, that she told me the following:

With terror I remember the year 1949. I was in kindergarten. I remember when the kindergarten was half-empty after the deportations of 1949. I knew what the 'Black Berthas' (the black cars in which people were taken from their homes) looked like. When I would be on my way home from kindergarten -- noone brought me, I went by myself there and back -- if I saw one of the 'Black Berthas' coming then I thought -- what if all of my family is taken, what will I do then? I will be all alone in the world. It was a horrible feeling. I pressed myself against the fence, so that they would not see me under the bushes. I couldn't understand how it would be better -- if they should take me as well as my family, or that I should remain

here alone. Or perhaps they would take *only* me, and my family would remain.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, one's earliest memory is symbolically representative of a central issue within a person's experience of her or his life. The individual's selection and articulation of his or her earliest memories is influenced by the unconscious so as "to conform with and confirm ingrained images of himself and others." (Mayman 304) What we find in the earliest memory which Benita chooses to narrate are two very critical issues, which apparently have been focal to her lived experience, and which reflect a positioning regarding herself within the sociocultural context. The first is the issue of the political situation of her childhood. The second is the issue of her relationship to her family. What seems most meaningful is how these two aspects, the political and the relational, become intertwined in this and following accounts in the autobiographical narration of Benita, indicative of the perplexity and complexity of the lived experience of many Baltic women.

The relational aspects of women's autobiographical narrations have been emphasized by numerous women literary theorists (Stanford Friedman 35), often with reference to the psychologically differing experience of a young boy in contrast to a young girl -- the young boy being encouraged to separate from the mother, at least in most Western cultures, and the young girl being encouraged to remain in closer relationship with the mother (Chodorow 93). Therefore, in contrast to the male autobiographical narration which is most often concentrated upon the development of the autonomous, unique self (Gusdorf 44), the woman's autobiographical narration is more often concerned with the development of the self-in-relation (Surrey 51).

In her narrative Benita expresses concern with her self-in-relation, especially regarding her fears of losing ties with her family. Yet, in the narration we not only encounter this relational aspect, but a very specific intertwining of the relational with the political. In fact, the political situation Benita speaks of is critical: the Soviet KGB-organized deportations of 1949, whereby 43,000 Latvians were deported to Siberia. Benita remembers how as a young child she experienced that half of her kindergarten class was missing on the morning of 26 March 1949. The situation was particularly severe since Benita lived in an area of Rīga where previously many educated, professional people had resided. Even though considerable numbers had already been deported in 1941 or had fled as political exiles in 1944, there nevertheless still remained those to be deported in 1949 -- and those who remained, such as Benita and her family. The tragedy of friends missing on the morning of March 26th was itself a

traumatic moment for Benita as a young child -- “we couldn’t understand in what way they were different from us -- why were they taken and we weren’t? It also meant the advent of quite substantial changes in their family’s daily life. Soon after the 1949 deportations there began an accelerated influx of immigrants from other parts of the Soviet Union, who were soon to occupy four of the five rooms in Benita’s family’s apartment.

Benita describes her fear of the “Black Berthas” driving through the streets, not realizing as a child that the deportations usually took place only on specific dates and specific times; instead, she feared that she herself could be picked up at any moment and sent away to Siberia. Her most poignant thoughts at this moment were concerned with ties to her family: what would happen if her family were deported and she were left alone, or if she was deported alone and her family left behind? In either case, there is an incredible existential, yet very real fear of being left alone, of being abandoned. What we do not learn from this narrative excerpt, but what Benita tells us indirectly in other parts of the interview is that her fear of being abandoned was associated not only with the politically motivated upheavals by the Soviet KGB, but also with the specifics of her relationship with her mother.

A similar intertwining of the relational and political aspects of her lived experience is encountered in Benita’s narration of an episode which she remembers from the time when she was 11 or 12 years old -- which would mean that this incident could have taken place around 1954-55. This is an incident which Benita describes with a great deal of emotionality: the experience itself would undoubtedly have been traumatic for a young adolescent. It concerns her memories of the ravaging aggression of one of the Russian neighbors who had been granted one of the adjoining rooms in Benita’s family’s apartment. Benita begins telling me about this incident in response to my questions regarding her experience at school, and of how the school experience was affected by Soviet ideology.

Benita initially tells about her experience of constantly being referred to as a “fascist” by her Russian neighbors -- “we constantly heard that we are fascists -- that we didn’t have a father because our father was Hitler”. Again, the experience itself involves an intertwining of the political and the relational, in a response that is highly emotional and painful. Many Latvians with whom I have spoken in Latvia have told me of their experience of being referred to as “fascists” during the Soviet period. This label was certainly unpleasant under any circumstances, even though its origins were apparent within the sociocultural context. Benita herself explained somewhat matter-of-factly -- “they (meaning here the Russian neighbors) were shown films from morning to night -- fascists, fascists,

evil, terrible -- that they (the Soviets) had won the war, and they are the good ones and the fascists are the bad ones.” However, in the interchange with her Russian neighbors, not only is Benita referred to by the unpleasant label of “fascist”, but her missing father is referred to as Hitler. One can only imagine how painful such a statement would be to a young adolescent, for whom the occasion of her father deserting the family was itself an issue of great emotional concern. Then to hear him referred to as Hitler must have been quite traumatic.

Even more frightening was the Russian neighbor’s eagerness to eradicate any remaining “fascists”, including her mother, and this was the impetus of a scene of drunken rampaging which Benita remembers in her autobiographical narration as follows:

That first neighbor was terrible. My sister and I had locked ourselves in our room, because mother wasn’t at home. We were awfully frightened. He was very drunk and was standing at the gate with an axe in his hands and waiting until our mother returns, so that he could have “killed a fascist”. We could not sleep because we had to stand at the window and yell to our mother not to come near. It was an awful feeling. He was drinking terribly and was in a terrible rage. Mother had missed the last bus and didn’t even return that night. He chopped up the gate and chopped up the basement door, and then he calmed down and came inside. But in the kitchen he threw everything -- all of the kettles and pans. We stayed locked in our room. We were incredibly afraid.

In her narration Benita continues to speak about the other Russian neighbors in their communal apartment, indicating how difficult and unpleasant it was to share the communal bathroom, the communal kitchen, the communal hallway.

From the perspective of intentionality and in view of the intertwining of the political and the relational, it seems apparent that the primary meaning Benita attributes to this episode is the political -- the unpleasantness of having to live in a communal apartment with the immigrant Russian neighbors. This narrated excerpt is one of several in which Benita indicates a very emotional negative stance towards the Russian immigrants -- an opinion which she reiterates upon several other occasions later in the interview. Of note, however, is that these negative opinions regarding the Russian neighbors are interspersed with highly positive statements about Russian writers. This ambivalent switching back and forth will be addressed subsequently.

The relational aspect of the above narration is less emphasized by Benita, but it is certainly evident and significant. Benita places the focus of her narration upon the drunken neighbor to whom she attributes the cause

of her fear. However, with regard to the relational dimension, it is the absence of her mother which is critical and related to the escalation of her fear. Benita explains that the reason why her mother was not at home upon this occasion was that she had been teaching music lessons in a nearby town and had missed the last bus. The most immediate association which one might make would be in terms of the political affecting the relational. In other words, a not unlikely explanation of Benita's mother's absence would be that she had missed the last bus because of her extraordinarily heavy work load -- which subsequently could be related to ambitions to be an exemplary Soviet citizen, who is working hard in her patriotic duty to place work as a first priority in the great communal mission to "build Communism". In fact, I have heard Latvian women (albeit from Benita's generation, not her mother's) state that they regret not having spent enough time with their children because they were "too busy building Communism".

Relationships between mothers and their children during the Soviet period have been analyzed by various psychologists, sociologists, and journalists. An often emphasized aspect of the context facing the Soviet mother-child relationship was that the official Soviet ideology regarding women's role in society was continuously shifting and changing. Whereas Lenin emphasized the equality of women and men, Stalin was noted for encouraging the "cult of motherhood", and in the 1950s women tractors drivers were hailed as role models (Du Plessix Gray 65). During the 1960s the Soviet woman was confronted with conflicting views in the pedagogical literature, some emphasizing the equality of the sexes -- woman as "producer" -- and others encouraging women to adopt more traditional roles -- woman as "reproducer", in order to improve the demographic situation. The Gorbachev period is similarly noted for the encouragement of women to return to a "purely womanly mission" within the family (Kerig 391). Nevertheless, as most analysts have noted, no matter what the official ideology during the Soviet period, the reality of everyday life was such that most women worked both outside the home, and carried the major responsibility of work within the home. Various analysts have also commented upon the difficult situation of the Soviet women in that the accepted societal stereotypes demanded that a woman should exhibit traditionally feminine traits, but that the reality of the "double burden" had obliged many Soviet women to develop more traditionally masculine traits such as responsibility and self-assertion (Atwood 7).

In terms of the mother-child relationship, the response of Soviet women to these shifting and conflicting ideological demands showed much

individual variation, qualified perhaps by some generalized tendencies related to ethnic traditions and specific sociocultural demands. Several Western psychologists have described Russian women during the Soviet period as being highly affectionate and indulgent with their children, but at the same time as restricting and limiting of the child's initiative (Bronfenbrenner 9, Pearson 41). There have been no generalized analyses with regard to the Latvian mother's relationship with her child during the Soviet period, but one can look to specific experiences, such as those narrated by Benita.

During the course of my interview with her, Benita spontaneously described her mother quite clearly and poignantly. At the very beginning of the interview, when I asked about her family's situation during her childhood, Benita began with specific statements about her mother: "Mother was very energetic. She was able to resolve all problems on her own. She could always manage everything -- she managed to attend all of the operas and concerts -- and to raise us as well." Benita thus begins her autobiographical narration with a primary representation of her mother as a very positive force -- energetic, capable, cultured, and able to raise her children as well. It is only in later comments that Benita provides additional insights regarding her mother's emotional distance. It gradually becomes apparent that the initial overwhelmingly positive description of her mother could be explained both as a psychologically defensive reaction of idealization, and also as a socioculturally determined reaction of adhering to the accepted societal norms that one should always say something favorable about one's mother.

In a later part of the interview, while she was telling about a professor who was particularly caring about his students, Benita offered the following comments:

I was surprised that someone was interested in helping us -- because our parents were terribly busy. My mother, she raised me from a distance. I don't remember that she would have hugged me or cradled me or kissed me. She wasn't loving because her own mother wasn't loving. Her mother lived across the yard from us, but she never took care of me. She never greeted me on my birthday. She would just yell at us if we approached her garden. Only after she died did I even realize that a plum tree was growing there. Before that I didn't even dare to look up at her garden.

The emotional distance which Benita experienced in relation to her maternal grandmother is affirmed in the narrations of Benita's mother, Austra, whom I also had the opportunity to interview. During our interview in 1995 Austra, born in 1915, was truly energetic and cultured in spirit, and a lively conversationalist. She was most sociable, and it was easy to

understand Benita's descriptions of her mother as helpful and friendly toward many people in the community. Yet, in terms of the issues concerning mother-daughter relationships, the interview with Austra confirmed much of what Benita had mentioned, especially regarding her maternal grandmother. Austra stated matter-of-factly: "My mother didn't have much kindness toward me." She went on to describe how her fondest childhood memories were in regard to the summers she spent at various farmsteads of her parents' acquaintances. Austra claimed that during these summers spent at strangers' farms "it was very interesting", and went on to describe how she would accomplish difficult self-set goals, such as traversing an overgrown field -- "I liked to overcome difficulties". The description of the emotionally distant relationship between Austra and her mother, and compensation for this by her own spirit of strength and independence certainly is congruent with what John Bowlby and other developmental attachment theorists would consider a pattern of "avoidant attachment" (Bowlby 167).

The tradition of strong, independently-minded Latvian (and other Baltic) women has been documented variously in literature and also occasionally in historical texts. The sociocultural and historical context has demanded that the Latvian woman be strong and hard-working. Historically she has taken upon herself major responsibilities in running a farmstead, especially as Latvian men were often conscripted elsewhere. In addition, Latvian women themselves have never had the opportunity to be in a privileged position such as Ibsen's seemingly fluttering Nora, nor have they even had such a role model from their own ethnos. Rather, there are exemplars of strong, powerful women in Latvian literature, such as Aspazija's Guna in *Sudraba šķirdauts*, who is considered to be a prophetess, a teller of fortunes, and holds the "power of the word", until she is seduced by Normunds, towards whom she attempts to be more gentle and light-hearted as a "little bird" (Sebre 64). In Latvian literature we also find numerous examples of emotionally distant mother-daughter relationships, including the relationship of Guna and her mother, and these are often in sharp contrast to much more enmeshed mother-son relationships. The distant mother-daughter relationship is seen also in autobiographical texts such as Vizma Belševica's *Bille* (Sebre 151).

What becomes apparent in looking at the autobiographical narrations of Benita and her mother Austra, is that the distant mother-daughter relationships they speak of are not merely the result of Soviet ideology urging women to be more ardent "builders of Communism". Rather, these seem to be the results of intergenerational effects referred to by attachment theorists in that emotionally-distant family relationships within one's own

childhood become internalized and serve as the model for being emotionally distant within future family relationships. As Benita herself stated -- “she (her mother) wasn’t loving because her own mother wasn’t loving”. However, what is most significant is Benita’s explanation of how she was able to break this intergenerational cycle of emotional distance.

During my second interview with Benita I asked what had enabled her to develop emotionally close relationships with her own daughters. Benita responded that during the 1970s when her daughters were born, child-rearing literature from the West first became available, including Benjamin Spock’s book of advice. “When I read this it was as if a rock fell from my heart, the realization that it is possible to do things differently.” Also, Benita emphasized that certainly not all Latvian mother-daughter relationships had been distant, and as a teenager she could speak with her friends’ mothers and receive emotional support from them. Even before the appearance of Benjamin Spock, “there were families who loved and spoiled their children.” Consequently, when her firstborn was just an infant, Benita’s friends were of great assistance: “Friends helped me -- they were very kind and loving toward my children. They would say -- how wonderful, what wonderful little feet and what wonderful little hands. They taught me to be more loving.”

Returning to the more political aspects of these autobiographical narrations, I would like to point out that the interviews which I conducted in 1994 and 1995 were with the primary purpose of eliciting autobiographical narrations regarding one’s lived experience during the Soviet period, with particular interest in how one’s ethnic perspective and identity had been affected by the ever-present Soviet ideology. In addition, I was particularly interested in intergenerational effects within the same family, again with primary focus upon political attitudes and ethnic perspectives. Upon analysis of thirty in-depth interviews regarding these issues, it was found that there were significant discrepancies in political attitudes and expressions of these attitudes across generations. One of the more interesting aspects of this comparison was the subtlety of difference in ideological attitudes regarding issues of nationalism. A comparison of the expressed attitudes regarding nationalism of Benita, her mother Austra, and her daughter Laila are indicative of these generational variations, and I have attempted to capture the difference in ideological attitudes within Benita’s family as follows:

- “unambivalent emotional nationalism” of Benita’s mother, born in 1915
- “ambivalent emotional nationalism” of Benita, born in 1943
- “tempered rational nationalism” of Benita’s daughter, born in 1971

The “unambivalent emotional nationalism” of Benita’s mother, Austra, is marked by an unswerving conviction that nationalism is a positive emotional response -- an attitude which she undoubtedly appropriated during the time of her childhood and adolescence within the first period of Latvian national independence, 1918-1940. Subsequently, during the Soviet period, Austra did not participate in the hailing of the occupants. During our interview Austra proclaimed that “I never went to a single demonstration -- never”, although she did slightly modify this statement to explain that perhaps, she did upon one occasion march a short distance. Austra also proudly described how on November 18th she baked a *klingeris* and decorated it with red-white-red candles (even though her daughter Benita does not recall celebrating November 18th, but rather some nearby name-days). When asked, “what are your thoughts about nationalism?” Austra responded -- “nationalism is an emotional experience -- it is in the emotions” and continued to explain that for her country she would give up her dearest possessions, including her piano.

Benita’s daughter Laila is much more pragmatic, rational, tempered in her ideological positioning. As do most of her peers, Laila admits that for her being Latvian is very important -- “I cannot imagine myself outside of being Latvian.” However, when asked about her thoughts regarding nationalism, she explained in a very logical, rational manner both the positive aspects of national self-awareness and the negative aspects of extreme nationalism: “Nationalism is deceptive -- it has negative connotations of being extreme. I think that there should be nationalistic self-awareness -- but nationalism, that already seems like putting oneself above the others -- that doesn’t seem right.”

More difficult to pinpoint is the “ambivalent emotional nationalism” expressed by Benita. When Benita was asked what she thinks about nationalism, her direct response was also quite tempered, pointing to the dangers of “narrow” nationalism. Benita stated: “Lately for us nationalism has become too narrow -- like blinds on a horse. That isn’t positive. There is no ethnic group that is all good or all bad. Every ethnic group has its pearls and also the opposite.” This initial response by Benita is certainly tempered and tolerant, in fact, similar to the attitudes expressed by her daughter. However, what is different in the narration of Benita, is that indirectly, within spontaneous comments interspersed throughout the interview, we find a highly emotionally charged ambivalence. For example, when speaking about Russians, Benita switches from positive to negative remarks in rather dramatic fashion: “The Russians are a bright people. If you read Turgenev, Chekov, it is very beautiful, it is great art -- you can’t just deny this.” But then, in the very next breath Benita asserts:

“The Russians are very dangerous and you cannot believe them -- not a single word of what they say -- they have *always* lied.” This categorical description of the Russians is certainly in sharp contrast to her tempered remarks about every ethnic group having its “pearls” as well as the opposite.

In attempting to understand the basis of this expressed ambivalence by Benita (and other members of her generation), a closer look at her most vivid childhood memories points to the importance of both the politically-situated lived experience, as well as the relational positioning of herself not only in relation to her mother, but to other important women in her life as well. Within the two previously cited narrative excerpts we see that Benita focuses upon the trauma elicited by the Soviet occupants, her Russian communal neighbors most specifically, and that she speaks of her fears of abandonment and feelings of being endangered. Most significantly, however, she does not directly link these fears with the apparent reality that her mother was not emotionally (or physically) there to protect her. Subsequently, Benita’s anger seems not to be somehow distributed between both neighbors and her mother, but totally projected onto the other, the stranger, a slight variation of Julia Kristeva’s emphasis upon projecting one’s (most often unconscious) dislike of oneself upon the stranger (3).

A dramatically positive emotional valence is expressed by Benita when speaking about the Russian high-school teacher who taught her class the Russian language, providing an opportunity to read English literature translated into Russian. Of note is that Benita speaks highly of this Russian teacher in both interviews, but only in the second interview does she reveal how affected she was ideologically within this relationship, indicating the intertwining of the relational and the political. Benita initially mentioned this beloved teacher in response to my questions regarding whether she had been a member of the Pioneers and *Komjaunatne* [Communist youth organization]. Benita explained that she joined the Pioneers later than many of her classmates. This occurred in seventh grade because her teacher had stipulated that only Pioneers would be able to participate in the dance festivals -- “I was just about the only one who was still on the outside -- I also wanted to be a part of it -- to participate.” Benita then went on to explain that initially she did not join the *Komjaunatne*, but did so in the eleventh grade, upon the encouragement of her favored Russian language teacher:

In grade eleven some of us joined. It was some kind of youthful idealism. We had a very good Russian language teacher -- she was young and very attractive and very emotional. She would tell us about Faulkner and

Steinbeck. She was very interesting, she was passionate. She said one should not be lukewarm, not to be in the middle -- under her influence we joined.

During our second interview, five years later, Benita similarly spoke highly of her Russian language teacher; different is that Benita began to speak more directly about the ideological stance of her teacher, and how this would eventually affect her as well:

Until eleventh grade noone said that we must join the *Komjaunatne*. But the Russian language teacher said -- you are so lukewarm. She was 26 years old and a Russian, very emotional. She said it would be good to join the *Komjaunatne* -- the heroes are those who burn for some cause.

During the last part of our interview Benita spontaneously began to speak of her ideological convictions during adolescence, which were affected by this beloved teacher:

I also thought that Khrushchev had done something good -- he showed that Stalin had done much evil. I joined the *Komjaunatne* at that time. I thought it would be possible to effect change. But when Khrushchev was displaced I was in shock. Mother laughed and said -- you see, you see how they behave toward each other? I said -- no, it can't be that Brezhnev just takes over which Khrushchev is away on vacation. I said -- no, he probably himself just wanted to retire. Mother said -- you naive little goose, you believe what they say? I said-- yes, it can't be that they have done this.

Benita's statement, indicating her adolescent belief in the Soviet system, is much in contrast to the initial position which she held during our first interview, when she insisted that she had not been affected by the Soviet ideology -- "No, I never had the feeling -- we said that which we needed to say officially," thereby implying that her true beliefs were never in accord with the official doctrine.

What occurs during the second interview, is not only that Benita is able and willing to speak more directly about her adolescent belief in the Soviet system, but also that she is able to speak more positively about the Russians living in Latvia. When in the year 2000 I asked her about the after-effects of the Soviet period, Benita responded:

There is one very positive thing -- we were very friendly and very helpful to each other -- because all of us had it equally bad. There weren't such materialistic differences as now. Somehow everyone helped each other. That also comes from the Russians -- Russians are very helpful.

In effect, the differences in the autobiographical narrations of Benita indicate that during the second interview there is a greater openness to the

different aspects of her previous experience. Certainly, there is a much greater willingness and ability to acknowledge her own implication in previously adhering to the Soviet ideology, at least momentarily. Also, the second narration also includes positive statements about the Soviet period, and also more positive, tolerant opinions regarding the Russians living in Latvia. There has been little psychological research to date regarding the effects of having lived in the totalitarian Soviet system. However, Czech psychoanalyst Michael Šebek speaks about the “cost of losing self-dignity and self-respect” for those who during the Soviet period “remained silent and joined the gray masses” (55). In other words, Šebek addresses the problem of loss of self-respect in succumbing to the demands of the Soviet system, which in many cases meant one’s participation in a life of “double think” where one spoke in public the official doctrine, but within the private sphere held a different set of beliefs.

The psychological position of Benita -- and many of those of her generation -- is even more complicated, in that there were periods of her life when, as she says herself, she *did* believe. Another Latvian woman, who also during the first interview had given no indication that she had ever believed in the Soviet ideology, responded in the second interview to my questioning about her childhood beliefs in the following manner:

To some extent we believed -- to some extent.

Which part did you believe, as a child?

We believed -- we believed everything which they wrote in the books.

It is, of course, perfectly understandable that a child would believe what she or he is taught in school -- what is written in the books. That is what books and school are all about, generally. However, what is meaningful regarding Benita and others of her generation is that after 1988 the entire societal discourse turned to the negatives of the Soviet system, which before this time could not have been discussed publicly, and which many did not previously realize. During the period shortly following the return of national independence, when my first set of interviews took place, it was apparently an adaptive psychologically defensive reaction to distance oneself from any former affiliation or even childhood belief regarding the Soviet ideological system.

It seems meaningful that now, in the 21st century, Latvian women and men are able to return to their memories of the past, participating in the “spirals of remembrance” concerned with “return, repetition and reconfiguration” (Freeman 47). It is through this spiral-veered process of turning and returning that one is able to recreate meanings of the past experience, and to create new patterns within the autobiographical

narrative. It is precisely through this process of turning and returning, telling and retelling that one can develop new narrative subtleties which include a greater appreciation of oneself, and subsequently a greater appreciation of others. As Julia Kristeva has encouraged, we can “come back to our origins (biographies, childhood memories, family) in order to better transcend them” (4), because it is through the process of greater understanding of ourselves and of the influences upon our selves, that we can develop greater tolerance -- greater tolerance of ourselves and the other. It is also through the process of returning and reconfiguring, of recognizing and articulating that we can create more empowering narratives of ourselves (Lionette 7). As autobiographical narratives continue to enfold the intertwining of the political and relational, in the process of developing greater understanding of oneself in relation to the other, no longer will political conflicts serve to occlude the emotional pain incurred by needs unmet within relationships, and that which has been held back in the past can be developed for the future.

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