

Exploring Resilience and Communicated Narrative Sense-Making in South Africans' Stories of Apartheid

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Guided by the communication theory of resilience (CTR) and communicated narrative sense-making (CNSM) theory, this study examines narrative resilience—or retrospective storytelling content that reflects a storyteller's ability to reintegrate after difficult circumstances—in South Africans' stories of apartheid. Participants were 17 South Africans who identified as Black, Colored, or Indian and endured the government-sponsored systematic oppression of apartheid. In semistructured interviews, participants told their stories of resilience in the face of the traumas of apartheid. Analyses illuminated four themes of communicated resilience: affirming identity anchor of toughness (i.e., showing strength in the face of adversity), foregrounding productive action (i.e., working to combat apartheid), putting alternative logics to work (i.e., focusing on positivity and hope), and crafting normalcy (i.e., normalizing life in apartheid). These themes support and advance CTR by exploring communicated resilience from a foundation of narrative theorizing and

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sociocultural understanding. Implications for furthering a social ecological conceptualization of resilience are investigated.

Keywords: resilience, communicated narrative sense-making, South Africa, apartheid, stories

Between 1948 and 1994, South Africans endured the government-led system of institutionalized racial segregation called apartheid. During this time, South Africa was dominated politically, socially, and economically by White people, who comprised approximately 10% of the population (Goodman, 2017). The apartheid system of social stratification positioned White people in power, followed by those of Asian or Indian heritage (i.e., "Indian"), mixed race and some Indigenous individuals (i.e., "Colored"²), and Black Africans (i.e., "Black," who comprised about 75% of the population). Between 1960 and 1983, the South African government implemented one of the largest mass removals of people in modern history, forcefully evicting 3.5 million Black South Africans from their homes and into race-segregated townships that were often barren and isolated from viable employment (African Studies Center, 2013). In Cape Town, the site of the current study, the vibrant multiracial District Six community was evacuated and bulldozed after being declared a "White" community. The government apportioned family land, restricted employment opportunities, and segregated public facilities, schools, and social structures based on race. Movement was limited and travel passes were required for Black, Colored, and Indian people; marriage and sexual relationships across racial groups were prohibited; and police repression and violence was rampant.

Although apartheid was officially abolished in 1994, its legacy of the vast racial disparities in health care, housing, education, sanitization, employment, and access to clean water is still present (Amoateng, Barber, & Erickson, 2006; Goodman, 2017). In fact, South Africa is one of the most inequitable countries in the world. It is ranked at 107 out of 152 countries on the Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), which represents citizens' access to material resources (e.g., health, education, and standard of living) that are foundational to resilience (UN Human Development Reports, 2021). Although South Africans' life expectancies have risen in past decades, income-related inequalities continue to increase, with 64% of Black and 41% of Colored people (but just 6% of Indians and 1% of Whites) living in poverty (South African Human Rights Commission, 2018). Compared with the other racial groups in South Africa, Black communities report higher rates of drug and alcohol use, incarceration, high school dropouts, HIV/AIDS, gang violence, and poor mental health (Amoateng et al., 2006). Indeed, systemic discrimination breeds lasting intergenerational mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Matheson, Foster, Bombay, McQuaid, & Anisman, 2019).

Given the unique residual stress that Black, Colored, and Indian South Africans continue to experience, this country is an important site for investigating resilience from a foundation of communication and sociocultural understanding. The current study is grounded in the communication theory of resilience (CTR), which positions resilience as a dynamic and multifaceted relational process that is situated within culture and context (Buzzanell, 2010, 2018). In CTR, resilience—or the ability to reintegrate after difficult life experiences—is constituted in

² "Colored" is the apartheid-era designation for South Africans who are mixed race or of certain indigenous ancestry and used widely by South Africans as a nonderogatory term.

communication and dependent on “discourse, interaction, and material considerations” (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 1). Resilience is enacted through five communication processes, elaborated below. CTR explores how people communicatively construct resilience in the context of cultural expectations and material concerns.

In the present study, we explore how South African adults discursively make sense of and enact resilience about apartheid. To better understand the sense-making process involved in resilience, we call upon communicated narrative sense-making (CNSM) theory (Koenig Kellas, 2018). In doing so, we expand scholarly knowledge on the sense-making component of resilience (Hauser, Golden, & Allen, 2006; Horstman, 2019) while answering calls to study both communicated resilience and CNSM in international and culturally diverse contexts (Buzzanell, 2018; Koenig Kellas, 2018). To those ends, we will first explicate CNSM theory and then the intersection of CNSM and resilience scholarship.

CNSM Theory and Narrative Resilience

Grounded in narrative theorizing (Bruner, 1990), CNSM theory posits that people use stories and story-like devices to make sense of and cope with their circumstances (Koenig Kellas, 2018). Constructing stories about difficult experiences, specifically, helps individuals organize, process, and thus cope. Of the three CNSM theory storytelling heuristics (retrospective, interactive, and translational), the current study focuses on retrospective storytelling. According to CNSM theory Proposition 1, the content of retrospective life stories reveals that storytellers’ have “individual, relational, and intergenerational meaning-making, values, and beliefs” (Koenig Kellas, 2018, p. 65). Well-being is positively related to life stories that are redemptive, positive, and highlight storyteller agency (Proposition 2).

Recent literature has also added *narrative resilience* to the CNSM Proposition 2 list of narrative components that predict storyteller well-being (Butauski & Horstman, 2020; Horstman, 2019). Narrative resilience—or retrospective storytelling content that reflects a storyteller’s ability to reintegrate after difficult circumstances (Butauski & Horstman, 2020)—focuses on how individuals “story” their lives in a way that reflect resilience. To be resilient, individuals must construct a resilient story about their experiences (Buzzanell, 2010). As such, narrative resilience is the meaning-making component of resilience (Hauser et al., 2006). Narrative resilience is reflected in stories that acknowledge the struggle, take action, seek a silver lining, find strength in others, and support, which have been linked to storyteller mental and relational well-being (Butauski & Horstman, 2020; Horstman, 2019).

Because life narratives help to capture the cultural nuances of individuals’ sense-making (McAdams, 1993), CNSM theory and narrative resilience can be helpful in illuminating cultural influences of enacting resilience. Although CNSM theory has been largely situated in U.S. American scholarship, it is grounded in narrative theorizing that accounts for and has studied narrative as a multicultural human sense-making and relationship-building device (McAdams, 1993; McCabe, 1997). The current study works to strengthen both CNSM theory and CTR by expanding beyond the U.S. American samples and answering scholars’ calls for a richer understanding of the role of culture in resilience and narrative.

Resilience and CNSM as Culturally Dependent

Resilience is enacted based on cultural beliefs and conventions. Ungar (2006, 2021), who has investigated resilience in more than 1,500 youth in 14 sites globally, claims that there are common-core

elements of resilience around the globe, but these elements are shaped by culture. For example, secure attachment is integral to youth resilience around the world, but attachment figures are culturally bound. Researchers have underscored the necessity of a social ecological conceptualization of resilience, which considers contextual factors that contribute to resilience, such as resources, community support, socioeconomic stability, and cultural expectations (Theron, 2012; Ungar, 2021). Theron (2012) calls for more qualitative and mixed methods resilience research in South Africa to “give voice to youths’ and communities’ own understanding of the meanings of, and processes integral to, resilience” (p. 336).

Communicated resilience is enacted through discursive and material resources and explored in depth in CTR. Buzzanell (2010, 2018) proposes five processes for communicatively creating and enacting resilience. First, crafting normalcy is enacted through creating a “new normal” in the face of stress. This occurs through adapting language, rituals, routines, and stories to account for the change brought about by a stressor. For example, to deal with the vast changes in social problems and community crime, communities in South Africa established structures like “trauma rooms” and other support systems (Conradie, Human-Hendricks, & Roman, 2020). Second, *affirming identity anchors* occurs when individuals steel against adversity by calling upon helpful elements of their identity. In South Africa, the philosophy of *ubuntu*—which means “humanity” or “I am because we are”—serves as an identity anchor by rallying individuals and communities to support one another (Barbarin, Richter, & deWet, 2001). Third, individuals enact resilience through maintaining and using communication networks, which involves fostering relationships and relying on them for strength and support. Strong social bonds, cohesive relationships, and support structures were integral to the survival of community groups oppressed under apartheid (Conradie et al., 2020). Resilience scholars call for more community-based support for South African youth to thrive (Theron, 2012). Fourth, putting alternative logics to work refers to understanding and approaching the stressor in creative and helpful ways. For example, research has found that vulnerable South African children can ameliorate their risk factors through fostering their spirituality, which emphasizes prayer and hope in dealing with stressful situations (Barbarin et al., 2001). In this study, spirituality was negative correlated with aggression and positively related to academic motivation among Black South African children. Finally, when individuals are downplaying negative feelings while foregrounding positive actions, they choose to focus on the positive emotions and behaviors that emerge from a stressor, rather than the negative and less helpful elements of the situation. For example, to mitigate increased crime in their communities, school administrators and teachers in at-risk South African communities have been implementing programs to teach youth how to effectively resolve conflict and manage their emotions (Barbarin et al., 2001). In sum, these five resilience processes consistently emerge in CTR research, can cooccur, and often correspond with certain triggers existing in the stressful situation (Scharp, Geary, Wolfe, Wang, & Fesenmaier, 2021).

To date, most research has studied communicated resilience as conceptualized by U.S. American participants (Buzzanell, 2018). These studies have been important in laying a foundation for understanding communicated resilience; yet, scholars have recognized the need to further test the concept in diverse contexts, including international sites (see Buzzanell, 2018). A few scholars have highlighted a cultural-based understanding of communicated resilience by accounting for cultural expectations such as in Chinese families (Kuang, Tian, Wilson, & Buzzanell, 2021), undocumented youth of Mexican origin (Kam, Pérez Torrez, & Fazio, 2018), or migrants living in the United States (Scharp et al., 2021). In these studies, the scholars found variations of the CTR processes that accounted for the discursive and material resources

available to their participants, which is essential to understanding how coping occurs across cultural groups (Afifi, Afifi, Merrill, & Nimah, 2016).

CNSM theory is a useful theoretical framework for expanding on the cultural nuances of CTR processes. CNSM and CTR complement each other in their shared focus on sense-making and relationships as essential for well-being following disruption. CNSM theory illuminates meaning-making, which is a central component of resilience (Buzzanell, 2010; Hauser et al., 2006; Horstman, 2019). CNSM theory contributes to scholarly understanding of how individuals, embedded in context and culture, make sense of their difficult experiences intrapersonally as well as relationally (Koenig Kellas, 2018), which can expand CTR by capturing the multifaceted and reciprocal influence of culture and sense-making on resilience. Although it has been long understood that storytelling practices and expectations differ across cultures (McCabe, 1997), the relatively young CNSM theory has not been tested outside of the United States. Doing so can illuminate how differing storytelling practices manifest in communicated sense-making.

In the current study, we investigate narrative resilience in the retrospective stories of apartheid told by South African adults who identify as Black, Colored, or Indian. In so doing, we expand the purview of CTR by answering scholars' calls to attend to the contextual and cultural factors contributing to the enactment of resilience (Ungar, 2021; Ungar & Theron, 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2020) and by using CNSM theory's Proposition 1 to better understand the role of communicated sense-making in enacting resilience through retrospective storytelling. As such, our research question is:

RQ: How do Black, Colored, and Indian South Africans demonstrate resilience in their retrospective stories of apartheid?

Method

Participants

Participants were people who lived in South Africa during the time of apartheid (before 1994), spoke English,³ and, as part of a larger project on parent-child conversations about apartheid, parents to children born after apartheid. Although we recruited individuals of all races for the larger study, because of the structural and systemic differences in the lived experiences of White people versus everyone else during apartheid in South Africa, we analyzed the data of those participants who identified as Black, Colored, and Indian for the current study ($n = 17$). Five participants (29.40%) identified as Colored, five (29.40%) as Indian, and seven (41.18%) as Black. There were seven men and 10 women, ranging in age from 29 to 61 years old ($M = 45.70$, $SD = 8.45$). Two participants were divorced, single, and engaged, respectively, one was widowed, and 10 were married. At the time of the interview, all participants lived in the suburban/urban Cape Town area. See Table 1 for demographics.

³ English is one of 11 official languages of South Africa. According to the 2011 Census (Statistics South Africa, 2012), 20.0% of the Western Cape speaks English as their primary language. English is widely used as a second language.

Table 1. Participant Demographics.

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Sex	Occupation	Relationship status	Number children	Children ages
Travis	53	Indian	Male	university lecturer	Married	3	33, 23, 19
Margie	57	Colored	Female	hygiene controller	Divorced	3	35, 32, 28
Sibusisiwe	61	Black	Female	university lecturer	Married	5	41, 36, 30, 26, 22
Auralia	45	Colored	Female	home executive	Married	2	24, 13
Edward	38	Colored	Male	psychometrist	Married	2	7, 2
Xola	43	Black	Female	home executive	Engaged	2	12, 5
Zoe	49	Black	Female	library assistant	Single	2	23, 15
Jenny	51	Colored	Female	medical research officer	Engaged	2	23, 20
Zelda	50	Colored	Female	teacher	Married	3	34, 30, 24
Palesa	29	Black	Female	teacher	Single	1	3
Fundile	37	Black	Male	radio production engineer	Married	3	4, 4, 4 mos
CJ	38	Indian	Male	correction officer	Married	4	14, 12, 8, 1
Luke	36	Indian	Male	correction officer	Married	1	10
Nishma	54	Indian	Female	housewife	Widowed	4	36, 34, 21, 21
Manfred	49	Indian	Male	engineer	Divorced	2	26, 20
Matthew	45	Black	Male	special effects designer	Married	3	19, 13, 3
Tania	42	Black	Female	HR administrator	Married	3	19, 13, 3

Procedures

We used purposeful sampling to recruit a relatively equal number of participants from each of the apartheid-designated racial groups. The first author—who is a White U.S. American cisgender woman—and second and third authors—who are Colored South African cisgender women—collected the data. The second and third authors recruited participants through snowball sampling in their personal and professional networks. Participants selected a convenient meeting place, which included the second author's academic office, participant's workplace (e.g., break room at a preschool, hotel lobby), public place (e.g., café), or the participant's home.

We collected data through semistructured interviews. The first and second authors collaborated to create the interview protocol and secure their institutions' ethics approval. The interviews focused on South Africans' stories of apartheid, resilience, and parent-child socialization. We began the interview with the following prompt, adapted from McAdams's (1993) life story interviews:

We'd love to learn the story about your experience during apartheid. Most stories have a beginning, middle, and end. Feel free to think about your experience in that way. Tell us as much or as little as you'd like. Let's start from the beginning... what was your first memory of apartheid?

Relevant to the current study, we asked follow-up questions about their stressors and resilience during apartheid. The first and second authors conducted a pilot interview to test the questions, edit the procedure, and establish consistency in their interviewing styles. Nine interviews were conducted by the first and second authors together; six by the first author; four by the second author; two by the first and third authors together; and one by the third author. Each interview was completed with one participant at a time, except with two Black participants (who were married) and three Indian participants (who were neighbors), who preferred to be interviewed together. Interviews concluded with an unrecorded informal debriefing conversation in which the researcher(s) offered the participant(s) coffee or tea and talked with them about the interview to help them process emotions or memories that arose. The first author took extensive memos; the second and third authors debriefed the first author on their memos. The interviews lasted 16–90 minutes ($M = 49.48$; $SD = 18.03$).

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a local transcriptionist. The resulting 549 double-spaced pages of transcripts were randomly checked against the audio-recordings to ensure accuracy. We removed all identifying information and created culturally reflective pseudonyms for each participant.

Data Analysis

We used Tracy's (2020) phronetic iterative approach to analyze the data. This approach alternates "between considering existing theories and research questions on the one hand and emergent qualitative data on the other" (Tracy, 2020, p. 211). We used CTR and CNSM as sensitizing devices. While in South Africa, the first, second, and third authors discussed preliminary findings about communicated resilience emerging from the data. The observations from the second and third authors—both Colored South African cisgender women—were recorded and used to inform the data analysis. On returning to the United States, the first and fifth

authors—both White U.S. American cisgender women—immersed themselves in the data by independently reading the entirety of the transcripts and memos to allow for meanings and patterns to inductively emerge. In this open coding phase, they independently identified and derived descriptive codes to understand what was going on in the data by asking themselves broad questions (e.g., “what is happening in these stories?”) to search for participant meaning. Examples of codes that emerged during primary-cycle coding were “pride,” “reframing,” and “rebellion.” Next, they engaged in secondary-cycle axial coding (Tracy, 2020), wherein they related categories to subcategories to create conceptually situated themes. Here, they created descriptions and identified exemplars for the emergent themes and organized them based on the pattern. After the themes were finalized, they then engaged in negative case analysis, wherein they searched for examples in the data that contradicted the established themes (Tracy, 2020). Although we did not find evidence of contradiction in the themes, we did recognize the need to collapse two themes and reorganize some subthemes.

To verify our findings, we employed several “big-tent” criteria (Tracy, 2020) for quality in qualitative research, particularly sincerity and credibility. To demonstrate sincerity, the authors remained self-reflexive throughout the entire process of study design, data collection, and data analysis. Because the first author, who led the data analysis, is not part of the culture being studied, she continually considered how her interpretations were shaped by her positionality and sought guidance from the second and third authors throughout the process. Our use of thick description to explicate contextual meanings throughout this study demonstrates our commitment to credibility (Tracy, 2020). We also used triangulation wherein data was collected by multiple authors with varying backgrounds. These expert scholars and cultural informants were familiar with the data but unfamiliar with the theoretical frameworks of the present study. Altogether, we discussed the findings in light of the South African scholars’ lived experiences and scholarly expertise in sense-making and resilience surrounding apartheid. No significant changes were made to the themes, but we edited a few pseudonyms to better reflect the participant’s culture and sharpened the language used to present the findings. In response to an insightful reviewer’s suggestion, we edited the theme names by incorporating CTR terms to better illustrate the connection between the findings and the theory (e.g., being tough became affirming identity anchor of toughness).

Findings

Four themes reflecting participants’ narrative resilience about apartheid emerged from their stories: affirming identity anchor of toughness, foregrounding positive actions, putting alternative logics to work, and crafting normalcy. Each of these findings mapped onto CTR processes with some added meaning among these South African participants, as highlighted in the labels and exemplars, presented below.

Affirming Identity Anchor of Toughness

In stories centering on affirming identity anchor of toughness, participants explained that their resilience was based in their mental and physical strength. These storytellers highlighted their own and their family members’ strengths in the face of hardships, abuse, and violence that they endured during apartheid. Participants explained they needed to “stand your ground” and “not give you power over me” (Jenny) when they were discriminated against. Edward, who is Indian, failed out of school twice and “people don’t often come back from that, but I went on to finish (high school) with distinction and I ended up being the head

boy at school.” The moral of his story was: “I am going to continue fighting. I am going to continue getting up when I’m knocked down because I believe that I have been put on this Earth for something greater than what I am doing right now.”

Some participants acknowledged that “it was hard” but that they needed to “carry on” for their families (Jenny). Edward told stories of fighting to send his children to private schools so they could have a good education. Zoe, who is Black, told the story of taking care of her siblings and father after her mother died, even after she had her own baby. She sold alcohol, ice cream, cakes, and candy to make money for the family. She said, “I had to grow up quick, quick, quick . . . [take] over as a mother in the house. See that there is food. See that everybody’s go[ing] to school.”

Sometimes participants narrated showing strength through breaking laws or social norms surrounding apartheid. Participants told stories of rebelling as a reaction to inequity and/or teaching their children to do so (e.g., Sibusisiwe). Edward told a story about how he learned later in childhood that White people lived in the nice neighborhoods, so his cousins and he jumped into their yards, stole fruit, and played on their playgrounds as acts of rebellion. When they were caught, the White people “beat them to a pulp.” Edward saw this *toughness* as an act of resilience:

I think there is a certain level of resilience that was built into you because of not having anything. Because of having to fend and fight for survival to some extent growing up. So I think that you have that built-in resilience to put on even when it is tough . . . I had to really fight in order to make it to this point in life.

Some of the Black and Colored participants’ intergenerational stories underscored the *toughness* of their family members and ancestors who endured the oppression of apartheid. These stories, like Margie’s (who is Black), emphasized the importance of “knowing where you come from.”

Foregrounding Positive Actions

Whereas those who included affirming the identity anchor of toughness in their stories of apartheid were making claims about their character as a strong person, those who highlighted *foregrounding positive actions* were resilient by *doing* things. These individuals acknowledged the difficulty of apartheid, but when asked how they demonstrated resilience, they told stories of action—organizing protests, speaking out against the injustices of apartheid, and learning about their rights. They channeled their hate of apartheid into something productive. Sibusisiwe, a Black Xhosa-speaking woman, said:

We have a responsibility of changing the history of [our] family. If this is where your family came from, you can’t start there. Perhaps you have started there but you need to move on. You have to break that cycle. So it was a question of feeling obliged to break that cycle of poverty and all those kinds of things. That is basically what made me feel I’m looking forward to positive things that [will] happen in my life.

Some of these stories of action referred to past *positive actions*. About past actions, participants told stories of how they worked to end apartheid. Black participants like Sibusisiwe, Jenny, Fundile, and Matthew joined or aligned with groups like the African National Congress (ANC), the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, or the Black Consciousness Movement to learn about their rights and stand up for injustices. Matthew joined the militarized arm of the Azanian People's Liberation Army and had to go into exile during his training; Fundile became "wide awake" after joining the Black Consciousness Movement. Sibusisiwe narrated her advocacy as a process that unfolded over time and grew into a lifelong fight against apartheid. She joined "the struggle" to channel her bitterness and anger into something useful. In the Women's League of the ANC, she "went through a political education to understand my rights and also what this is all about." She said that she dedicated her life to "challenging exclusionary practices in the schooling system," thereby *foregrounding positive actions* by channeling her anger and hurt into action.

Some participants told stories of their parents and their communities *foregrounding positive action* by advocating against apartheid. Palesa, who is Black, told a story of her parents hanging a picture of Nelson Mandela in their home, even though it was banned. She was raised:

Quite aware and conscious of apartheid . . . being the evil system that it was. It was something that was spoken of in the family. And one of the conscious decisions that my parents made was for us to know.

In Fundile's community, the children were part of the struggle. Her friends would gather to "sit under the street lamp and sing the struggle song. That was something that was entrenched in us. We grew up also quite aware of [apartheid] when we were young . . . it is something that everyone is fighting [against]."

Whereas some participants reflected on their past actions to fight apartheid, many of their life narratives ended with stories of present-day advocacy. For example, Sibusisiwe notes,

It is still here. Apartheid is, I always say to people, apartheid is not dead, but it smells funny. It just smells funny. But it is not dead. It is very much alive in our schools. And . . . it has not changed its form, but it has only changed its color so that you don't see it. If you don't analyze it, you might think that all is well. All is not well.

Zelda, who is Colored, said that present-day parents "must have the courage" to stand up for their children about injustices at school. Many participants mentioned the flawed education system and how they advocated for their children and others' children at school. Edward is working to change the curriculum in schools "so that children are informed about the true history of South Africa, about the suffering." Zelda noted that people seem more willing to fight against structures of inequity when they affect their children. As a whole, these participants recognized the power of *foregrounding positive actions* in enacting resilience in the face of apartheid.

Putting Alternative Logics to Work

One of the most prominent themes of resilience emerging from participants' stories of apartheid was *putting alternative logics to work*. In these stories, participants chose to reframe apartheid by focusing on positivity. The two subthemes emerging from this theme are *finding the good* and *finding hope*.

Finding the Good

Many stories were rich with efforts to *find the good* in apartheid. Participants highlighted that, because of the rules and social order, it was a simpler time. They lamented that in apartheid, some things were better than they are currently. For example: children respected their elders (e.g., Margie, Vusi, Zelda, Zoe), crime was lower (e.g., Margie, Zelda), people felt safer (e.g., Margie, Zoe, Zelda, CJ), people worked harder (e.g., CJ), things were more peaceful (e.g., Zoe), places were not as crowded (e.g., Zelda), and work was easier to find (e.g., Zelda). After discussing the current struggles in postapartheid South Africa, Zoe noted, "I really feel like sometimes we can go back to those years." Zoe and Manfred echoed their appreciation of a time where the rules were clearer and easier to follow.

Many participants who *found the good* in apartheid noted that their communities were closer and more unified (Manfred, Vusi, Zoe). Indian participant Manfred explained that apartheid brought together those of the same racial group. Margie noted people used to make you "feel welcome into their home and making me part of their table to sit and eat." CJ, who is Indian, said:

There was this sense of togetherness, unity . . . remember that? As a child, you will be roaming around the street and aunty will see you and beat you. Everyone was so responsible about the child[ren] of the neighborhood . . . [Apartheid] brought out a sense of community that your child is my child and that we are taking care of one another.

There was a sense of unity in the Black, Colored, and Indian communities.

The participants who *found the good* often wrestled with the good and bad of apartheid in their narratives. They acknowledged that the apartheid structure was problematic but appreciated some of the simplicity it provided. After explaining how she felt safer during apartheid years, Margie articulated this tension well: "To me, apartheid was most of the times, it was good times. It was good years. I don't say it must come back, but there is a lot of goodness in apartheid." Zoe's story demonstrates that some of the safety of apartheid came at a cost:

So those years, at least, it was safe. People were scared of police. People were scared of just doing whatever. Because there was that they used to call the death penalty . . . So people were scared to just commit any crime . . . And our community was just a small community so we know each other. So it was going to be very easy to identify somebody who did something wrong. Yes, we used to walk to school; no transport, no nothing. Sometimes bare feet to school . . . But it was very nice. We really enjoyed that life. Now it's like . . . but we didn't even know we were oppressed up until the 1980s.

Some participants saw the evils of apartheid as a touchstone for appreciating the good of a postapartheid South Africa. Manfred, an Indian participant, explained,

You don't really know what success is if you haven't experienced failure or hardship. You need to go through it to really appreciate it . . . There's no such thing as the easy life without the hard life first.

In Margie's stories of poverty (i.e., no electricity or running water in the house) and oppression during apartheid, she passionately showed her pride for her roots. She said, "I am who I am today" because of where she came from. These participants told stories of the difficult times in light of the positives that emerged from them.

Finding Hope

The second subtheme of putting alternative logics to work was *finding hope*. In these stories, participants expressed that they coped with apartheid by looking forward to a more peaceful future. Sibusisiwe notes that racial oppression and "poverty didn't really bother me" because she was "looking forward to positive things that [are] going to happen in my life." Many of the *finding hope* stories contained messages about letting go or moving on. Zelda explained that, much like how we tell children to forgive, we must move on: "Listen here, 'you know what you did last to me?' Don't start with that. Let's forget. It's through. You can't go back. We only move forward and that is all and that will be our victory." She wants her children to live and work with people of all races. Xola, who is Black, told stories of how her family worked to move forward after apartheid because it was Nelson Mandela's directive: "Madiba said we must not live in the past." These participants *found hope* by letting go of the past and appreciating the present. "There is work for everyone and we live in harmony. We're free. It's nice," said Zelda. She noted that "we go on, we go on." In these stories, participants expressed that "time also just heals wounds" (Jenny) or "life goes on" (Zelda). Some highlighted peace in South Africa: Zelda said she will keep hoping and praying that "maybe one day [after] I die maybe, maybe after that South African would be one."

Many of these stories of hope involved religion—largely Christianity, but also Hindu—and/or faith in God. When they were asked about how they coped or showed resilience in the face of apartheid, many people referenced religion (Fundile), prayer (Tania, Zelda, Margie), reading scripture (Nishma), or going to church (Xola, Zoe). The functions of religion varied. Sometimes religion was associated with group togetherness such that Edward noted that going to church helped them build community in the face of oppression, and Margie emphasized that her family would pray together (i.e., "there were always prayers, and I think that is what supported us"). Some said that their faith in God allowed them to understand apartheid as a part of a bigger plan—"That is how God wants it[,] and we're going to do what God wants" (Edward)—or that race is arbitrary—"if you're following God's word, there's no such thing as Black, White, Indian, and Colored. It is only we that differentiate with color" (Nishma). Sibusisiwe explained that her Christianity helped her find value in a system that told her she was less-than: "As a Christian, you would know that you were born in the image of God and you're not born in the image of a dog . . . Even if somebody comes and say you are a dog, you see [otherwise]." When asked about resilience, Edward summed up *finding hope* and his faith in God:

I don't know what tomorrow holds and I believe there is something positive and I think it comes from a religious belief. But there is something positive waiting for me so I am going to push on . . . because I believe that I have been put on this Earth for something greater than what I am doing right now.

Many of these *finding hope* stories involved forgiveness, which was, at times, tied with religion. Black participant Tania said, “The past is the past but we will learn from the past . . . You must learn to forgive and forget . . . It happened and now it is passed away. We are in a new era now.”

Crafting Normalcy

Finally, those participants who *crafted normalcy* told stories of accepting apartheid as “just the way it was.” Most of these participants’ stories highlighted that their parents or other family members normalized the apartheid experience for them as children. For example, Manfred said her parents taught her the rules of apartheid: “These are the rules. These are the things you can do. These are the things you can’t do. When you’re out in public there are certain areas where you’re prohibited from spending time.” Similarly, Colored participant Auralia said, “I think my parents accepted [apartheid] basically—that is what we’re allowed and that’s what we did.” Participants noted that they and their families just got used to being prohibited from specific beaches, train cars, or restaurants (Zelda, CJ, Manfred, Edward). Even being harassed by the police became normal. They were largely not happy with apartheid, but they accepted their circumstances (Manfred). They learned over time to “go into this mute form of lifestyle . . . where you don’t speak [about apartheid]” (Zelda), even within their families (CJ). During the interviews, we would often have to probe participants to remember issues of apartheid and oppression from their childhoods, perhaps because they had accepted it as normal life. Some participants, like CJ, noted that by normalizing the apartheid, their parents were protecting them from the harsh realities of the experience: “We were just a happy family. Although we experienced situations [of oppression], we were never bothered. We just accepted everything and we lived happily . . . Our parents protected us from evil.”

Others noted that, by *crafted normalcy* around apartheid, they subconsciously accepted their race as lesser. Edward explained that his family followed the apartheid rules and did not question them: “[my parents] were trained from a psychological perspective to know where they belong in society.” Jenny, who is Colored, noted the consequences of accepting apartheid: “The thing is, you actually acclimatize, you become conditioned that this is the environment that you live in. You don’t have a say . . . It’s like you were the little person.” Some participants explained that they only later became aware of this internalized racism. Sibusisiwe told the story of how her parents stood by as her teachers changed her Xhosa name to an English name, thereby stripping the rich Xhosa meaning of her name and identity. Although she was very smart, she struggled in school to speak and learn in Afrikaans, which was the oppressor’s language. It was not until her adulthood that she recognized these educational practices as institutionalized racism. In sum, these participants’ stories confronted oppression normalized through apartheid.

Discussion

In the present study, we investigated resilience of South Africans who identify as Black, Colored, or Indian through their stories of apartheid. Grounded in CNSM theory and CTR, we found that suburban/urban Capetonians constructed narrative resilience through affirming identity anchor of toughness, foregrounding positive action, putting alternative logics to work, and crafting normalcy. These findings strengthen theorizing by (a) considering the social ecological influences of narrative resilience and (b) highlighting the dark implications of communicated resilience. In what follows, we detail these contributions, explore limitations, and provide directions for future research.

A Culture-Informed Approach to Communicated Resilience

The findings of the current study help to sharpen the communicated resilience theorizing by taking a social ecological conceptualization of resilience (Theron, 2012). Our participants' stories contained several elements of resilience deemed "universal" (e.g., remaining positive) but are molded to cultural expectations and norms. For example, our participants articulated *toughness* as essential to resilience. This expectation of toughness is present in CTR's *affirming identity anchors*, wherein individuals in stressful situations call upon their own strength or other personality characteristics (Buzzanell, 2010). Yet, findings from the current study add nuance to the CTR processes in its unique South African commitment to "toughness." In his focus groups with youth in a settlement in Cape Town, Ungar (2006) found that making one's own decisions and standing up for oneself were considered elements of resilience. He speculated that, for Black, Colored, and Indian South Africans, there is a cultural reaction to the oppressive control they endured during apartheid. By *affirming identity anchor of toughness*, these individuals demonstrated their viability and worth. The implications of the pressure to *be tough* are concerning from a mental health perspective. Benjamin, Vickerman-Delport, and Roman (2021) found that rural South Africans were generally unaware of mental illness and/or held stigmatized beliefs about weakness surrounding it. The expectation of *toughness* likely reflects this stigma about receiving mental health care and may contribute to low rates of mental health care access. This finding exemplifies how Western conceptualizations of resilience might be reflected in international samples, but looking deeper into the cultural context elucidates a slightly different meaning.

Further, foregrounding productive action stories support and expand literature in narrative resilience (Butauski & Horstman, 2020; Horstman, 2019). In these stories, participants explained the actions they took to fix their problems during and resulting from apartheid. Similarly, taking action (e.g., leaving an abusive relationship) emerged as an element of narrative resilience in young adult women's stories of difficulty (Horstman, 2019) and other CTR research (e.g., Kuang et al., 2021). Our participants tended to create redemptive narratives (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997), wherein they acknowledged the trauma of apartheid, and then explained how they took action to address it. These actions included advocating against the apartheid government, joining groups such as the Black Consciousness Movement, and learning about the injustices of apartheid and postapartheid South Africa. Elements of Hintz, Betts, and Buzzanell's (2023) proposed sixth CTR resilience process *critiquing and resisting the status quo* are present in this finding. Indeed, Mosavel, Ahmed, Ports, and Simon (2015) found that South African Black and Colored urban youth living outside of Cape Town viewed community altruism and action as essential to improving their lives postapartheid. They believed that their communities would have to rally together to combat the adversities embedded in South African Black and Colored communities. Future research needs to investigate resistance as an act of resilience in these and other minoritized communities.

Dark Sides and Ethical Considerations in Studying Communicated Resilience

Although the current study's findings highlighted the perseverance and strength of Black, Colored, and Indian South Africans, they also brought to light some costs and unintended consequences of resilience (Theron, 2012). As such, we will explore the dark sides of putting alternative logics to work and crafting normalcy.

Though seemingly functional and positive, the subtheme *finding the good* may also have some costs. Participants who *found the good* did so by focusing on positive outcomes of the discrimination

and injustices they faced in apartheid, such as how apartheid brought together those of the same racial group. Our Black and Indian participants reminisced about how their communities were tightly knit during apartheid times but has since then eroded. From a social ecological perspective, South African communities' cohesiveness and close relationships protected them from some of the stressors of apartheid (Conradie et al., 2020; Mosavel et al., 2015). Once apartheid was dissolved, the social structures that once provided them emotional and bodily safety also dissolved; new community members moved in, bringing with them a sense of vulnerability that was not a part of the social fabric during the apartheid era. Participants who *found the good* missed the peace, hard work, and safety of apartheid, compared with their perceptions of modern-day Cape Town. This fondness of apartheid may be, in part, because participants reflecting on their younger years, which seem like simpler times for anyone telling their life stories (McAdams et al., 1997).

Regardless of the reason to *find the good*, it may create pressure for individuals and families in underserved communities to "rise above" and display resilience, rather than demanding structural change at the community or national level (Theron, 2012). Celebrating and expecting resilience from underserved individuals, families, and communities may take the pressure off leaders to address issues of inequity. For example, when asking urban South African youth about how to maximize resilience and improve the lives of young people in their community, Mosavel and colleagues (2015) reported that their participants identified structural improvements such as laws and regulations, community facilities, and social services, rather than individual traits such as positivity. Although these youths do enact individual resilience, they desire some structural support to alleviate the pressure to do so. *Finding the good* is a useful tool for overcoming strife as well as a mindset that may stifle collective action toward good.

Similarly, there are both positive and negative implications associated with the subtheme of *finding hope*. In these stories, participants chose to look to a brighter future by forgiving those who committed crimes of apartheid, letting go of anger and resentment caused by discrimination, and/or asking God to provide solace. Some of these participants noted that they chose not to think or talk about apartheid, particularly with their children, so they could move forward. Hope may be a functional way for individuals to make sense of their traumas, particularly while undergoing those experiences (Buzzanell, 2010).

Yet, hope can be problematic. Individuals who are offered false hope may feel misled, resentful, or stunted in their coping (Koenig Kellas, Castle, Johnson, & Cohen, 2017). Those undergoing difficulty may also feel pressured to perform hope or "fake it" for others, which may contribute to avoiding, denying, or stifling their negative emotions and thereby preventing them from coping. Black, Colored, and Indian South Africans may feel pressure to "move on" without processing or finding retribution for the extensive harm caused by apartheid. In this way, certain versions of resilience may stifle individual and community forward progress. Although *finding hope* functions, at least in part, to help individuals cope with difficulty, resilience scholars need to further explore the harmful effects of hope as well (Theron, 2012).

Finally, those who *crafted normalcy* decided to get used to—rather than fight against or complain about—the restrictions of apartheid government. Given the emotional trauma of facing systemic discrimination (Matheson et al., 2019), accepting apartheid is remarkable. Similarly, undocumented youth in the United States work to find similarities between theirs and other families

(Kam et al., 2018) and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon reported trying to provide a sense of normalcy for their children despite their daily stress (Afifi et al., 2016). These findings suggest that normalizing is common in families enduring chronic stress. Those participants who *crafted normalcy* likely built emotional protection from their harsh realities.

Yet there may be problematic implications of *crafting normalcy* around apartheid. Several participants noted that by normalizing apartheid, they had to accept their race as lesser. As children, when they understood that they should not interact with White children or go to the same beaches as White families, they learned to see themselves as “tainted” or “bad.” Sadly, this acceptance of inferiority was the goal of apartheid. Our participant Edward explained that, later in life, he became aware that “the system was implemented for you not to become who you are, but (to be) an oppressed person that is not flourishing . . . We were oppressed in a sense that we couldn’t even think properly.” This demonstrates that systemic discrimination creates the foundation for internalized racism and consequential mental health effects in future generations (Matheson et al., 2019). Beyond the context of racial segregation, future research should continue to explore the positive and negative implications of normalizing a traumatic experience or environment.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although the current study meaningfully contributes to scholarship, there are two limitations and subsequent directions for future research to note. First, the sample was recruited primarily through snowball sampling through the second and third authors’ social and professional networks. Although the sample reflected a relative variety of social classes (based on participants’ professions), it would have benefited from more representation from those in lower socioeconomic conditions. It is likely that those living in both urban and rural poverty will uniquely make sense of structural injustices, health disparities, police brutality, and other stressors involved in and resulting from apartheid. Given that around half of South Africans live in poverty (Goodman, 2017), communicated resilience is a vital topic of study in this context.

Second, it is important to mention the authors’ positionality as relevant to the project. The second and third authors are South African born, raised, and educated, and the first, fourth, and fifth authors are U.S. Americans trained at U.S. universities. There were several measures we took to ensure the participants’ viewpoints were accurately captured in the data analysis and presentation of the findings. The researchers collaborated from the genesis of the study, including planning, recruitment, data collection, preliminary data analysis, data conferencing, and manuscript editing. Yet it is important to acknowledge the U.S. American authors’ implicit biases toward Western epistemology and worldview likely colored the manuscript. Future communication research should work to center African scholars and theories.

In conclusion, the current study synthesized research in CNSM theory and CTR to investigate the narrative resilience of South Africans who endured apartheid. In so doing, research on communicated resilience can continue to illuminate the process by which individuals of varying cultural backgrounds enact resilience in the face of difficulty.

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