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Looking Back to the Future: On Turning Ghosts Into Ancestors

Postcolonial theory works on a double edge of attempting to understand what occurred and these understandings are continually haunted and shadowed by what might have been 'even if at the same time we need to recognize that the notion of independence is politically and psychologically a myth' (Edwards 2008 p. 124). There is an important axis of understanding which focus on working towards uncovering memories, acts of resistance and complicity, and holding in mind what might have been so that a different imaginative reckoning with the past can be made. Edwards explores importantly that being 'haunted is, in a sense, to be called upon, for the phantom presence returns to collect an unpaid debt' (Edwards 2008 p. 121). Edwards further explores that while in postcolonial writing this unpaid debt often refers back to imperial dominance, he wants to use it differently here in order to refer to a different debt, which is that we make good our inheritance (Edwards 2008). There is, however, a different debt which involves laying our ghosts to rest for there is a crucial understanding which I, for one, have still to explore: what can the desire for history, especially personal history, be a desire for, and what is it about the lost, the absent, the haunting that recruits me so effectively. For as Phillips points out history-writing 'can be a struggle to hold oneself together' (Phillips 2007). It can be argued that every society has its haunting, its secrets, its underbelly of violent acts and emotions and there is a responsibility for those of us who inhabit postcolonial societies to speak out and explore from the margins. Orhan Pamuk's essay *My Father's Suitcase* (2007) gestures towards exploring a number of pertinent matters such as why do, and for who do, we write? What do we hope to fend off and repair through the activity of writing or speaking? I haunt my father and a different exploration is required in order to turn my adherence to my ghosts into my ancestors. This requires pursuing, albeit with difficulty, the issue of what am I haunted by precisely and why? What does history provide in the present? And what is it about the past that, perhaps, provides a contradictory and ambivalent consoling fiction?