

RENOUNCING RACISM IN A DUTCH REFORMED CONGREGATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The Dutch Reformed Church provided the theological justification for Apartheid since 1948 and contributed to discourses of racism and cultural hegemony. In this research narrative conversations were used to confront racism prevalent among many Dutch Reformed congregants. Social discourses, created through language, marginalised and oppressed people of Colour in South Africa. In this project, narrative conversations were used to deconstruct these oppressive racial discourses. Antjie Krog's book on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work, *Country of my skull*, confronted the congregants with the painful and dehumanising effects of Apartheid. Externalising conversations assisted congregants to face their guilt and the unjust discourses trapping them. In addition, this deconstruction empowered the congregants to challenge racism and cultural hegemony by living more ethical lives.

Key terms

Narrative; Pastoral conversations; Post-modern; Co-construction; Social construction discourse; Racism; Cultural hegemony; Oppression; Injustice; Discourse; Silence; Ethical; Culturally sensitive; Dutch Reformed Church



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and general description of the area of concern

Race and racism shape people's lives (Frankenberg 1993:1). White people and people of Colour live racially structured lives. Racism is a structural advantage, of race privilege. It is a "standpoint", a place from which White people look at themselves, at others, and at society (Frankenberg 1993:1). Racism and race are socially constructed phenomena, which have a real, tangible and complex impact on an individual's sense of self, experiences and life chances.

In asserting that race and racial difference are socially constructed, I do not minimize their social and political reality, but rather insist that their reality is, precisely, social and political rather than inherent and static.

(Frankenberg 1993:11)

Personal experience and discussions with average Dutch Reformed congregants seem to suggest that previously privileged White Afrikaners still maintain the dominant discourse of cultural hegemony and racism which for decades prevailed in South Africa.

Ignorance and a lack of information play themselves out in different ways when in conversation with Dutch Reformed congregants. A good example of this is when a person insists on the theoretical "advantages" of Apartheid. Balcomb (1998:57-58) accurately states that:

You will find those for whom everything has gone wrong. The country, in their opinion, is falling apart. Standards are dropping, crime is increasing, the "barbarians" are at the door, trying to break it down. In the words of one of Apartheid's former architects - something "too ghastly to contemplate" has happened. These are those who were previously the privileged, those who, by virtue of the colour of their skin, were able to access the best of everything that the society could offer without any threat from those who were of a different skin colour.

In accordance with Freire's (1970:28-29) theory that "apprenticeship must come from the oppressed themselves" by replacing lovelessness with love,

the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) strived to do just that! Frustratingly, as attested in Antjie Krog's *Country of my skull* (1998a), many Afrikaners fail to recognise the dominant stories of violence and abuse against Black people, revealed by the TRC. This has led to the ideal of a "Rainbow nation" being realised in pale shades only.

In South Africa, racism and Apartheid went hand in hand with dehumanisation. Freire (1970:27-28) states that:

Within history, in concrete, objective contexts, both humanisation and dehumanisation are possibilities for man [sic] as an uncompleted being conscious of his [sic] incompleteness. But while both humanisation and dehumanisation are real alternatives, only the first is man's [sic] vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.

According to Freire (1970:28), the struggle for humanisation, for the emancipation of labour, for the overcoming of alienation, for the

affirmation of people as persons would be meaningless if we are to admit to dehumanisation as a historical vocation. This struggle is possible only because dehumanisation is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which, in turn, dehumanises the oppressed.

In the year 2000, six years after the first democratic election in South Africa, dehumanisation and racism are supposed to be declining. Many Dutch Reformed congregants have ostensibly adjusted to the new South Africa, but have dehumanisation and racism really disappeared? If White, middle class people's deepest convictions remained unaltered, then the results would be no more than false generosity.

Freire (1970:28-29) defines the difference between false generosity and true generosity. He says that any attempt to "soften" the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false "generosity." An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this "generosity", which is nourished by death, despair and poverty. For this reason the dispensers of false generosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source (Freire 1970:28-29).

"True generosity" comprises precisely of fighting to destroy the causes that nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the "rejects of life", to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands - whether of individuals or entire communities - need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work, and in working, transform the world (Freire 1970:28-29).

Congregants of the Dutch Reformed Church have to be assisted to take responsibility in order to start practising true generosity. In *Kerk en Samelewing* (Church and Society) (1990:17), the Dutch Reformed Church's viewpoint on racism is made clear. This document states that racism is a sin that cannot be defended by any person or church. It continues to say that racism implies oppression, dehumanisation, discrimination and violence.

Markowitz (1994:69) explains the task the oppressors have to face: They have to broaden their knowledge of the range of human possibility, equipping themselves to question whatever had been taken as common sense, enhancing the capacity of each to contribute a distinctive point of view.

1.2 Need for and significance of the study

Dutch Reformed Church ministers are faced with an enormous challenge: As part of their prophetic task in the church, they have to awaken in their congregants an awareness to their role as former and especially current beneficiaries of Apartheid, and the consequences thereof. They also have to assist their church members to accept responsibility in deconstructing or challenging the dominant discourse of racism and dehumanisation, and to open up to alternative discourses of responsibility and more ethical ways of being.

The acid test, of course, lies in mobilising ordinary White, middle-class congregants to start playing an active role in the healing of the country in their day-to-day lives.

The title of this study, *Renouncing Racism in a Dutch Reformed congregation*, implies that I investigated what a minister in a Dutch Reformed congregation could do to eradicate racism amongst Dutch Reformed congregants. This is a very broad field - a minister can preach about the topic, he/she can do Bible studies about it, and he/she can

launch all kinds of projects in order to renounce racism. Consequently, it may seem surprising that this study and my proposed project aimed at a much smaller scale. It may seem like a paradox to address the enormous problem of racism in the equally large Dutch Reformed Church by relating stories in a small group. But that is exactly the point! Group work can be an excellent way of addressing this huge problem. Racism and prejudice should be confronted qualitatively on a grass-roots level.

1.3 Theoretical framework of the study

In this study, I made extensive use of narrative theory as interpreted by Michael White (1995:159). Narrative therapy takes place when dominant discourses are deconstructed so that subjugated, yet preferred knowledge may emerge (see chapter 2).

Knowledge, while possible, is difficult to untangle in terms of its relations to social structures, as it is always inseparable from power both in its production and effects.

(Papps & Olssen 1997:21)

Foucault's (1977:223) theory of modern constructions of deviance that works to hierarchise individuals in relation to one another, served as the basis for this study. Foucault says that discourses and systems produce each other. Abnormalities in society are categorised, and identified, and must be recognised as "true" by the bearer. In this way a hierarchy is set up which becomes a model for, and pervades, all social relationships (see chapter 2). I also used the concept of *cultural hegemony*. Cultural hegemony can be described as:

A form of ideological control in which dominant beliefs, values, and social practices are produced and distributed throughout a whole range of institutions such as schools, the family, mass media and trade unions.

(Papps & Olssen 1997:21)

As a dominant ideology, cultural hegemony functions to define the meaning and limits of common sense as well as the form and content of discourse in a society. It does so by positing certain ideas and routines as natural and universal. It refers not only to those isolatable meanings and ideas that the dominant class "imposes" on others, but also those "lived" experiences that make up the texture and rhythm of daily life. Consequently, cultural hegemony can be defined as "cultural leadership,

as the mode of articulation by which a class assumes its leading role” (Papps & Olssen 1997:21).

I made use of the liberation theology, and of a prophetic pastoral practice in this study. Liberation theology seeks to interpret the Christian faith from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed (Fergusson 1998:387; Pieterse 1995:104). Over a period the conviction grew among critical theologians that theology was conditioned by its environment. In a sense, every text is an interpreted text. Reading is not merely a literary process but also a social, economic and political exercise (Pieterse 1995:102). These ideas formed the basis for doing theology in a new way, instigated by the poverty-stricken Third World, and giving birth to liberation theology. Themes like the preferential option for the poor, socio-economic liberation as part of salvation and a shift from theory to praxis saw the light and spawned a new hermeneutical approach to doing liberation theology (Pieterse 1995:103).

Liberation theology accentuates a critical reflection upon Christian praxis or practical experience, especially the practical experience of struggling for liberation (Nolan 1988:23). In liberation theology, there is no separation between religion and life. All aspects of life are spheres of

divine activity in all its intensity. Salvation is seen as a situation in which harmony and peace prevail in community life (Nolan 1988:185). See also chapter 2.

A prophetic theology reads the Bible in relation to social analysis and from the perspective of the poor, the oppressed and the disadvantaged (De Gruchy 1990:65). Walter Brueggemann (1978:13) sees the task of prophetic ministry as nurturing, nourishing and evoking a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture of our society. He uses the terms “radical criticism” and “radical energising” in referring to the Old Testament prophets who continued the work of Moses who sought to form “a new community that focused on the religion of God’s freedom and the politics of justice and compassion” (Brueggemann 1978:109). See also chapter 2.

1.4 Research question

The research question was:

How can a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church facilitate congregants towards a true generosity through the narrative approach?

1.5 Purpose of study

The aim of this study was to explore how a narrative approach to pastoral counselling could be utilised with a small group of Dutch Reformed congregants to facilitate them to:

1. Reflect on the discourse of racism in our own lives and in the Dutch Reformed Church, and to identify the effects that racism and cultural hegemony had on us as White Afrikaans people and on people of Colour.
2. Explore alternative discourses that will introduce true generosity and practices of respect, humanity and responsibility.

A minister can preach in a way that will make people aware of the above, but with this study, I wanted to find out if narrative conversations in small groups could be complementary to, and even more helpful than preaching about this subject.

1.6 Feasibility of this study

It was not difficult to invite a group of Dutch Reformed congregants to participate, as many people in the Church have an urge to talk about this crisis.

1.7 Limitations

Time was a constraint, as the research was done for the purposes of partially fulfilling the requirements of a Masters degree. Therefore, this study was restricted to the above-mentioned group of people. As this was a narrative study, it was not the intention to make concrete, generalising conclusions or provide proof of any hypothesis.

1.8 General description of research approach

A qualitative study

In this study, I conducted a qualitative research. The traditional conceptualisation of the research interview is grounded in a masculine, positivist paradigm. This paradigm encompasses several assumptions,

including a unidirectional flow of information from interviewee to interviewer, the sovereignty of objectivity, and the value of decontextualising and depersonalising the interview relationship. This paradigm, however, is problematic in that it embodies the assumed passive role of the "subjects" of the research (Limerick et al 1996:449).

Keith Ballard (1994:311) states that research is often undertaken in order to provide information that can be used in policy and practice, but qualitative research takes a different approach. "It involves researchers in the critical appraisal of current policies and practices with the immediate intention to change them. The process of evaluation and of implementing changes the research" (Ballard 1994:311). Lived experience is central to qualitative inquiry and the criteria of evaluation in qualitative research are based on ethics of caring, personal responsibility, and open dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:102).

Virginia Olesen (1994:166) says that in qualitative research there is the assumption of intersubjectivity between researcher and participant and the mutual creation of data. "In a certain sense, participants are always 'doing' research, for they, along with the researchers, construct the meanings that become 'data' for later interpretation by the researcher"

(Olesen 1994:166). The conversations conducted with the group, were "co-constructed" by all participants. A more egalitarian relationship featured amongst us.

Clandinin and Connelly (1991:265) argue that narrative, qualitative inquiry involves a process where the researcher and the participant jointly live out their narratives. Participants are continuing to tell their own stories, but the stories are now being lived out in a collaborative setting. The data for this collaboratively lived narrative involves field notes of the shared experience, and interview transcripts of discussions between the two participants, researcher and group member, and the stories shared (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:265).

In a qualitative study, the relationship between the researcher and those who are being researched should be a subject-subject relationship. A qualitative study is not premised on the notion of a random sample whereby the group is seen as a microcosmic representation of the White, middle-class members of the Dutch Reformed Church. I assumed a narrative approach to the conversations. Rather than maintaining the traditional distant, apparently objective and so-called blank-faced research persona (Frankenberg 1993:30), I positioned myself as explicitly

involved in the questions and conversations. At times I shared with the group either information about my own life or elements of my own analysis of racism as it developed through the research process.

This research approach served two different purposes: In addition to seeking to facilitate discussions about racism in a social context where privilege and particular discourses on race construct zones of silence, repression, and taboo, it served to democratise the research process, reducing the extent to which the researcher was positioned as an invisible presence (Frankenberg 1993:30).

Another reason I chose a qualitative research method, is because the adoption of a neutral, blank-faced researcher requires a narrow definition of the group members as "data", and thereby keeps in place an extreme power differential between the researcher and the group (Frankenberg 1993:31). It was necessary to step outside the neutral persona during this research, and tell the group members about the philosophy behind the project in order to secure their interest and help.

As I stated earlier, I followed a narrative approach, and I made use of externalising conversations throughout this study. Storytelling and story

reading were used as method of work. I had narrative conversations with research participants as a co-explorer of ideas relevant to the participants. See chapter 2 for a description of a narrative approach.

1.9 Research procedures

The group I had narrative conversations with existed of eleven people, including myself. I acted as the group leader. The group members were all White middle-class to wealthy people. Their ages ranged from twenty-four to fifty. We were five women, and six men. All the group members underwent secondary education, and they were members of the Dutch Reformed Church. To keep my promise of confidentiality, I did not use their names in my report.

In order to assemble a group, an advertisement was placed in the church's newsletter. People who were interested in the subject, could contact me. I held a meeting with them, where I described the background of this project. Each member received a letter of consent that they had to sign. The letter of consent made it clear that taking part in the conversations was voluntary, that they could refuse to answer particular questions,

discontinue the conversations altogether, or turn the tape recorder off temporarily. One group member decided to discontinue our discussions.

Each member of the group was required to read the book, *Country of my skull* (Antjie Krog 1998a). We met once a week for a period of ten weeks. We used the book as a starting point for our conversations. During this time, the group and I co-constructed new stories of taking responsibility.

The conversations were summarised in letterform after each session. Each member received copies of these letters, and we co-edited the letters at the next meeting.

In the letters, I included questions that crossed my mind after each session, and we discussed these questions at the subsequent meetings.

The letters I wrote did not act as interventions apart from the conversations we had. The letters and the conversations were intertwined, the one following from the other. The letters and the conversations were all part of the same narrative conversation. The letters served to extend

¹ See addendum for letter of consent.

the conversations, and that was very helpful because of limited time (Epston 1994:33).

The research was done in such a way that the participants were the primary beneficiaries. I was aware of the possibility of power play in the researcher-participant relationship. Therefore an approach of transparency was followed.

1.10 Chapter outline

This study consists of five chapters.

Chapter 2: This chapter consists of the theoretical framework of the study. I described the post-modern epistemology and its consequences for thinking about race. I also looked at a post-modern theology, and the implications thereof for the practical theology. Lastly, I described a narrative approach, and the role of a group leader in narrative conversations. All the discussions in this chapter were based on our situation in South Africa, and in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Chapter 3: It was not possible to provide an adequate account of the history of Apartheid in South Africa in the context of this chapter. My more modest task was to highlight how the Apartheid-system marginalised, used and humiliated Black people, while empowering Whites. I specifically outlined the part that the Dutch Reformed Church played in the history of South Africa since 1948. Subsequently, I discussed the Dutch Reformed Church's attitude towards the Truth Commission, and finally, I analysed the short period after the Truth Commission.

Chapter 4: In chapter 4, I elaborated on my description of a narrative process. I explained how I applied it to the narrative conversations that I had with the group.

Chapter 5: Reflections and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

A NARRATIVE PASTORAL APPROACH

2.1 A post-modern epistemology

A post-modern approach does not reject modern assumptions of scientific knowledge, expertise or progress; it only attempts to revise the modernist view of truth and knowledge (Papps & Olssen 1997:37).

The post-modern approach rejects truth in particular as an "exclusive notion" (Du Toit 1997:942). Truth as such is not rejected, but the boundaries of truth claims as well as the conditions under which they operate are recognised.

The conception of objective knowledge (which is a prominent aspect of the modernist approach) is also questioned by a post-modern approach (Dill & Kotze 1997:15). Hoffman states that our beliefs about the world are social inventions (Hoffman 1990:2). Our discourse about the world is not a

reflection or map of the world, but an artefact of communal interchange (Gergen 1985:266).

The knowledge of knowledge compels. It compels us to adopt an attitude of permanent vigilance against the temptation of certainty. It compels us to recognise that certainty is not a proof of truth. It compels us to realise that the world everyone sees is not *the* world but *a* world which we bring forth with others. It compels us to see that the world will be different only if we live differently. It compels us because, when we know that we know, we cannot deny (to ourselves or to others) that we know.

(Maturana & Varela 1992:245)

2.1.1 Discourse

Within the modernist belief system, language is seen as a reliable and accurate link between the objective and subjective worlds. According to this belief system, there is a real world "out there", and we can know it through language (Freedman & Combs 1996:28). Language is used to represent external reality, and is seen as a tool with which we can describe objective knowledge that is outside of us.

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Within a post-modern approach, language is not a mere tool to describe objects, but language *constitutes* our world and beliefs. Societies construct their views of reality within language. "The only worlds that people can know are the worlds we share in language" (Freedman & Combs 1996:28). People live, and understand their living, through socially constructed narrative realities that give meaning and organisation to their experience (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:26).

The term "discourse" is a prominent concept in post-modern thought. Discourse as a "public process of conversation" constitutes meaning (Lowe 1991:45). Beliefs, laws, social customs, habits of dress and diet - all the things that make up our "reality" - are social discourses, which arise through social interaction over time (Freedman & Combs 1996:23). Social discourse helps societies maintain and disseminate hard-won "knowledge", but it can also blind us to other possibilities or subjugated knowledges (Freedman & Combs 1996:24).

A dominant discourse in society can have a constituting effect on an individual's personal life story, because people tend to internalise the dominant discourses of our culture, believing that they speak the truth of our identities (White 1992:33-52).

Two important discourses that are relevant for this research are those concerning race and social class. The dominant discourses in our society disempower large numbers of people by excluding them from a significant voice in these particular areas of discourse (Freedman & Combs 1996:38).

2.1.2 Post-structuralism: Foucault and Derrida

Foucault: Discourse and power

Foucault's (1980:109-133) work had its base around the ways in which society categorised and thus marginalised certain sectors of society resulting in labels such as "normal" and "abnormal." According to Foucault, language is a powerful tool used by those in power to shape society's attitudes by determining the preferred discourses in society while other discourses are subjugated.

Foucault (1980:109-133) speaks of the "Government of truth", which refers to the power over human conduct which Western societies have extended to those authorised to speak from a position of knowledge and in the name of "truth." Today we experience this power as the truth of norms - the expert's truth about what is normal or abnormal, safe or dangerous.

A discourse of disciplinary expertise contributes to the government of conduct - yet this discourse has not been legitimised by contract, conquest or divine right. Such power is not vested in any individual. According to Foucault, power has to be studied as something that circulates, or as something which functions in the form of a chain. It cannot be localised, it is never in anybody's hands, and is never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. It is exercised through a net-like organisation. Those who maintain power positions control knowledge, and those who hold knowledge are placed in a powerful position.

To Foucault, knowledge is thus linked to power (Lechte 1994:114). Foucault says about the relation between power and knowledge: "There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Papps & Olssen 1997:28). Discourse relates and helps organise social relations as power relations. It also organises and excludes forms of knowledge. "Power is usually thought of as the exercise of the will of one social act over others" (Parker 1989:61).

Foucault's view of power relations opens up an opportunity to rework instances of social interaction in the politically judged patterns of racism

and other forms of domination at work in society (Parker 1989:67). When people become aware of unethical power discourses, they are more able to challenge the dominant stories that constitute their lives - and that helps them to change their roles.

Within the Apartheid system, the White people of South Africa were those who maintained powerful positions. The previous government claimed that it was in possession of the "truth." Apartheid did not depend only on a modern world-view; it claimed science and religion as witnesses to its truth (Du Toit 1997:951). The work of the Truth Commission opened many White South African's eyes to the pain and suffering that this so-called "truth" inflicted on people. Now that many atrocities committed "in the name of truth" have been revealed, most South Africans will agree that truth in any society has to be distrusted. The Apartheid system was a practical example of truth and power at work in society.

Derrida and deconstruction

Scepticism about dominant discourses in life brings about an exploration of the gaps, silences, ambiguities and power relations implicit in these discourses. Jacques Derrida tried to deconstruct Western metaphysics. Deconstruction, according to Derrida, does not take things apart, it is not

an operation; it only reveals how things are put together (Wolfreys 1998:14). Derrida wanted to undo a tradition that has dominated Western thought since early Greek philosophy.

Derrida had a methodological "device" to accomplish this feat (Sampson 1989:7). This device hinges on the notion of placing a term under erasure. "To place something under erasure is, literally, first to write a word and then to cross it out, and then to print both the word and its deletion" (Sampson 1989:7). For Derrida this strategic task is necessary for the task of employing the familiar in order to deconstruct the commonly known. The presence of one concept contains in it elements of the absent one. In this we see that every form of revealment implies some degree of concealment. If we reveal one thing, we conceal another. By considering one perspective, we neglect other similar perspectives. The tension between what is said and what is not said is *difference* (Lechte, 1994:107; Wolfreys 1998:7).

Derrida's aim is not to overthrow the Western tradition only to install another of the same sort in its place. His deconstructive aim is to undo the notions of identity in the first place (Sampson, 1989:8). Deconstruction opens the way for us to see hidden cultures and ways of

being in a new perspective. It also makes new meanings possible. In the South African context, the Western culture has been the only superior and efficient culture for a very long time. If we apply Derrida's deconstruction to our context, we discover the efficiency of many other cultures and knowledges that were obscured by Western discourses.

2.1.3 Social construction discourse

Social construction discourse questions the phenomenon of knowledge itself. Therefore it is more than just a new social paradigm. The social construction discourse does not want to be seen as a new truth, or the ontological right way of thinking. It only wants to emphasise the importance of language as social phenomenon through which humans as relational beings live.

Within a social construction discourse, we must keep in mind that people exist in language. Anderson and Goolishian (1992:27) state that communication and discourse define social organisation. "A socio-cultural system is the product of social communication" (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27). Meaning and understanding are socially constructed. Freedman

and Combs (1996:16) argue that the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws and divisions of labour that make up our social realities, are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another through generations, and from day to day.

Kenneth Gergen (1985:266) states that the social construction discourse is concerned with "explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live." With the social construction discourse, he wants to challenge the objective basis of conventional knowledge. According to Gergen, social construction discourse enables us to consider the origins of taken-for-granted assumptions about the mind, such as the symbol system believed to underlie language.

An important implication of a social construction discourse is that it "directs our attention to the social, moral, political, and economic institutions that sustain and are supported by current assumptions about human activity" (Gergen 1985:268). When I take a look at what Gergen says about social construction discourse, I can see that what modernists believed to be "hard facts", actually depended on an array of social micro processes. In a post-modern approach, there is an epistemology shift from

an experiential to a social epistemology. Gergen notes that the explanatory locus of human action shifts from an interior region to the processes of human interaction (Gergen 1985:271).

Social construction discourse does not offer foundational rules of warrant, but that does not mean "anything goes." In fact, the social construction discourse can be of use when it comes to questioning unethical ways of being. The social construction discourse invites us to view unethical discourses like racism as culturally constituted, and therefore these discourses can be deconstructed more effectively (Gergen 1985:273).

2.1.4 Poverty, cultural Colonialism, and "race"

Poverty

When George was born we were so broke I couldn't even afford diapers and had to use pieces of rags. Our meals were meagre. We couldn't afford to buy coal to heat the house in the morning, so my children's teeth chattered in the cold as they went about barefoot and scantily dressed.

(The story of Geli in Mathabane 1994:133)

Until this day there have been many voices of Black South African women who expressed the same agony, as the one mentioned above.

Much of the least attractive parts of the present South African (and African) political economy stems directly from the earlier history of Colonialism (1652-1910). In order to live comfortably in a newly found "home away from home", the White colonialists moved quickly to establish hegemonic structures. Black people were reduced to "drawers of water and hewers of wood" (Chitando 1998:76). The missionaries who came with the colonialists might sometimes have protested against the inhuman treatment of Black people but the colonialists were fully convinced that the "native" did not deserve better treatment (Chitando 1998:76; Kgatla 1994:209).

When the Africans exhibited will power, White interests were jealously guarded. Industry and commerce were made the preserve of the Whites, relegating Black people into servant roles. Black people could only succeed in peripheral occupations such as building and barber shops (Chitando 1998:77; Kgatla 1994:205). Chitando says that in the case of Zimbabwe, the position of Black people in the economy during Colonialism had decisive repercussions on their present-day status - and that is also

true for South Africa. Black people have largely been relegated to the class of consumers while the reins of power in industry and commerce are firmly in the hands of a few White males (Chitando 1998:78; De Villiers 1991:20).

By the end of the colonial period, the global hegemony of the Western free-market economy had been well established in South Africa. African economic and political systems were radically altered, particularly as the need for cheap labour resulted in the disintegration of ritual systems. This was caused by the absence of males for extended periods from their homes as migrant labourers left to work in urban areas (Venter 1998:430).

Today the gap between rich and poor in South Africa remains wide. South Africa has to contend with an overriding challenge, namely that Apartheid (and Colonialism) has left the country with one of the world's widest gaps between rich and poor (Maluleke 1998:327; Nürnberger 1994:124).

Cultural Colonialism

The biggest weapon wielded by Colonialism is cultural Colonialism (Nolan 1988:51; Wa Thiong'o 1986:3). Cultural Colonialism is "to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in

their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (Wa Thiong’o 1986:3). Cultural Colonialism makes people see their past as a wasteland of non-achievement, and that brings about the suffering of humiliation (Nolan 1988:51,52; Ward & Worden 1998:201-217).

In South Africa, the church’s record in this respect is regrettably appalling. The strategy of colonisation and mission in South Africa was characterised by a glorification of Western civilisation, and repugnance for Black culture and customs (Mbiti 1989:6-10; Balia 1993:209). Missionaries were exhorted to fight and eradicate “all the vestiges of the devil” from Black cultures (Kgatla 1994:202). The interests of colonialists and of missionaries did not always coincide, but the missionaries certainly profited from the logistics provided by colonial structures (Kgatla 1994:202). Colonial conquering of Black people was regarded as God’s action and necessary for the advancement of the mission enterprise (Kgatla 1994:202).

Many missionaries and colonialists embarked on a total onslaught against Black religious practices. Black people could not resemble “White Christians” unless they had been westernised in a special way. The stark contrast between Black and White people served as the justification for

the task of missionaries to bring Africans into conformity with White people. The names by which colonialists called the Africans clearly reveal the stereotypes and the exorcism campaign on which White people were (Kgatla 1994:203). Black people were described in all sorts of negative images. They were called non-European, non-White, non-Christian, non-Western, and all these implied their non-personhood (Kgatla 1994:203).

Balia (1993:210) describes how Christian missionaries saw the Africans, when he quotes parts of a book written in 1911 by an early missionary:

The natives of South Africa have migrated from the North, differing widely from each other in physique, in speech, in occupation, in tribal custom and in religion, and having among them Bushmen who in the scale of civilisation ranked lowest - he was a roving huntsmen, nothing more.

These stereotypes by the powerful became the cornerstone of oppression because the weaker and the poor were regarded as targets to be conquered. All these, together with the concomitant seizure of their land by force, left the whole fabric of African community life destroyed. The logical consequence for many Africans was to accept the negative

description of themselves by White people. Because they had lost everything, they could no longer be a proud nation - the dominated group defined themselves by the knowledge and power of the domineering group. White culture and values were raised to the level of universality and authenticity. In order to achieve high grades, the dominated followed the dominating value system, and used only the resources of the powerful. In this way Black people were kept poor and powerless (Kgatla 1994:203; Balia 1993:209-217).

The church brought a passive religion that told the poor and the oppressed to accept political decisions and authority without question, and to obey those in power for the sake of the peace of the nation. People were to prepare their souls for the life to come (Kgatla 1994:204).

For a period of eighty years since 1910, there were no fewer than five departments, created by the state, to keep the Black majority under the domination of the White minority. They were the departments of Native Affairs, Bantu Affairs and Education, Development and Training, Plural Affairs and Education, and Aid and Education (Kgatla 1994:204).

2.1.5 The concept of "race" in our everyday lives

Race is a cultural construct, rooted in a system in which not being Western is relegated to all that is less valued by the dominant culture. This is accomplished by the cultural hegemony that Western thought has had in our society. "Whiteness, masculinity and femininity are co producers of one another in ways that are, in their turn, crosscut by class and by the histories of racism and Colonialism" (Frankenberg 1993:233).

The cultural hegemony that made people believe that the Western culture is more superior to the African culture has been in existence for a long time. To be White meant that one was more intelligent, more developed, and wealthy. But through a post-modern epistemology "Whiteness" as a cultural construct, and the privileging of certain knowledges, are questioned.

When deconstructing these dominant discourses, there are many subjugated knowledges about race that are exposed. It is then discovered that White people are "raced", just as men are "gendered" (Frankenberg 1993:1). According to Frankenberg, "Whiteness" is only a "standpoint", a

place from which White people look at themselves, at others and at society. She describes how White people are captured in a dominant power discourse, where people of Colour are believed to be fundamentally "other" than White people (Frankenberg 1993:61). Within this discourse, people of Colour are seen as "different", "inferior", "less civilised" and "less human" than Whites, whereas White people are seen as examples of normality. A consequence of such a discourse is that White people usually fear people of Colour. For example, many White women believe that all Black men are rapists (Frankenberg 1993:61).

Because racism and Whiteness are dominant power discourses culturally constructed over a very long period, many people of Colour have bought into the idea that everything Western is better - even where small everyday detail is concerned.

bell hooks, in her book *Sisters of the Yam* (1993), describes how long, straight hair has been made the norm of what is beautiful, and how Black women inadvertently bought into this extreme example of cultural hegemony:

As grown-ups, many of us look back at childhood years of having our hair combed and braided by other Black women as a moment of tenderness and care that was peace-giving and relaxing. In a workshop with Black women, where one of the women present was trying to decide whether to process her hair, I began to talk about the different feel of natural hair, raising the question of whether processed hair is inviting to the touch. As with other such group discussions, Black women there began to insist that they did not like anybody touching their hair.

(hooks 1993:86)

When hooks pressed to look at the origins of this dislike, she found that it was rooted in fear that Black women's hair is not an aspect of their being that most of them considered as related to bodily pleasure. hooks says that many Black women regard their hair as a problem. She says that despite raised consciousness of Black people around the question of internalised racism, most Black magazines still favour images of Black women with long, straight hair.

This is one example of a cultural discourse that constitutes people's everyday lives. Racism as cultural discourse is centralised when people

are marginalised through the undervaluing of their culture, their art, their dances, religions, history, education and their language (Wa Thiong'o 1986:16). As hooks explains, it is also the undervaluing of people's physical appearance, substituting it with a dominant discourse of what success looks like.

Often, in advertisements, the light-skinned woman with straight hair will be depicted as the female who has a partner or who is sexually more appealing.

(hooks 1993:87)

People live by cultural language discourses. Racism is a social power discourse, and it needs to be brought into context, and be questioned. White people's lives are also constituted by these discourses. Being a White person, I cannot say that racism is a problem with which people of Colour have to cope. To deal with racism cannot be a type of charity with which we deal on the side. White people, just as much as people of Colour, are trapped within the race discourse.

2.2 A post-modern theology

If Christians are to minister effectively in a post-modern world, they have to understand the times and the seasons in which they live (Dockery 1995:15; Heyns 1996:625). A theology that tends to be a timeless and closed system of theological knowledge, unaffected by cultural shifts, runs the risk of becoming obsolete (Rossouw 1993:895). Heroldt (1998a:454) states that hermeneutics, as a theoretical reflection on the process of understanding, is clearly influenced by the frame of reference that is used. He continues to say that hermeneutics is intrinsically linked to epistemology, or the theory of knowledge.

As the epistemology of this project resides in a post-modern framework, it is only natural that the theology I feel most at home with is a post-modern theology. A post-modern theology is of such a nature, that one cannot summarise its meaning in one definition. Hence I will give a broad sketch of the implications that a post-modern worldview has for theology.

Within the scheme of positivism, theologians are tempted to use the Bible as a "text book", because truth is viewed as a prescribed static set of propositions that lends itself to be discovered (Heroldt 1998b:221).

In a post-modern theology, there is no such thing as universal truths or dogmas. Pieterse (1996:63) states that a post-modern sensibility has a clear aim of disrupting dominant identities which charade as "normality." The church in South Africa is in need of such a post-modern theology, because White-supremacist, Western and patriarchal "regimes of truth" and ideologies have to be deconstructed in order to begin the difficult process of repentance and reconstruction in our churches (especially in the Dutch Reformed Church). We have to realise that we cannot obtain a sure and exact knowledge of biblical reality. In the past, too many White South African male theologians claimed to have all the "true" knowledge. This knowledge had a tendency to marginalise many people (Pieterse 1996:50-64; Ackermann 1996a:32-49).

Within a post-modern theology, the task of the Church in this world is a prophetic one (Gerkin 1991:77; Pieterse & Theron 1994:152). The Old Testament prophets were ordinary people who began to see the commonly accepted practices of their people through the lenses of an alternative

consciousness (Gerkin 1991:77). "The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us" (Brueggemann 1987:12).

In South Africa today, the Church has the major task of speaking with a prophetic voice against the prominent beliefs of the mainline Protestant churches of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Charles Gerkin (1991:94) states that in the so-called mainline Protestant churches, the results of the rise to dominance of the White middle class during the previous two centuries are evident:

The meaning of Christian presence and White middle class respectability became so fused with each other that the deeper biblical meanings of Christian presence in the world have tended to become obscured. Those middle class ways of being Christian tended to emphasise class-oriented and male-dominated images of virility, independence, and capitalistic boosterism.

(Gerkin 1991:94)

The expression of the Church's prophetic task in the world, however, includes a sensitivity to human needs, a concern for justice, and an awareness of dominance over persons and systemic evil (Gerkin 1991:163; Balcomb 1998:63). James Poling (1996:XV) define systemic evil as follows:

Evil is the abuse of power in personal, social, and religious forms that destroys bodies and spirits. Evil is an abuse of power because the power of life comes from God, and all power should be used for good. Whenever power is used to destroy the bodies and spirits of God's creation, there is evil.

The Church has much to learn from the feminist theology, as described by Denise Ackerman (1996a:32-49), and from the liberation theology, as described by Gerald West in his book: *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation* (1991). The feminist theology especially forces a careful re-examination of the sacred texts of the Christian tradition. It examines the status quo, pronouncing judgement, and calls for repentance from the dominant ways of thinking, which usually marginalises people (Gerkin 1991:45).

Post-modern, feminist and liberation theologies emphasise the concept of accountability. Accountability "implies an acute awareness of injustice"

(Ackerman 1996a:45). Accountability requires "a hearing of and identifying with the voices from the outer circles and a resolve to live in such a way that the common good is advanced" (Ackermann 1996a:45). Ackerman further states that accountability is ultimately tested in the reality of the wellbeing of all. In the South African context, accountability was absent in the universal dogmas that the White Church, and the Apartheid regime believed to be the truth. In our present context, mutual accountability contributes towards allaying decades of suspicion and mistrust, and hastens the work for healing.

A post-modern theology will have far-reaching implications for the practical theology in our churches.

2.3 Implications for a practical theology

A post-modern theology will inevitably shift the emphasis in spiritual formation from "What do we believe?" to "Who are we?" (Rossouw 1993:901). In a post-modern theology, Christianity does not exist of dogmas anymore - a Christian has to develop a new identity and character through his/her faith in God. In a post-modern climate, there is no more

distinction between religion and secular life (Heroldt 1998b:225). Your personal, everyday life becomes your religious life. Our religion becomes integrated with our whole being and with everything we do, and this leads to a number of challenges for the practical theology.

The Christian church has to shift the focus from "being right" to "doing right." This means that the Church should be especially sensitive to the practical consequences that theological perspectives and belief practices might have on people (Rossouw 1993:903).

Concern for the marginalised is therefore a huge challenge for the practical theology. Liberation theology has a focused attention on the special concern displayed in Scripture for the marginalised (Rossouw 1993:902). In this sense, the Church has to be true to its prophetic calling, instead of just going with the stream. In Scripture we see a special concern for those whose human value and dignity are denied by society. The liberation theology places a high premium on the fact that in becoming human in Jesus, God was not born in the sumptuous palaces of kings. Rather, the Almighty and Transcendent took on the nature of a slave. God came down from His throne and chose to be born of poor parents, to live and die as a poor and oppressed human being so as to give

the oppressed new life and hope. In doing so, our Creator, in Jesus, chose to identify the divine Being with human suffering and pain, and to let Him share in it so that God might win freedom and life in its fullness for the downtrodden (Maimela 1998:118).

In praxis, a post-modern theology means that the Church in South Africa has to resist the temptation of returning to an inwardly focused stance, especially now that the official Apartheid system has been dislodged. The Church has to realise that being in the world means to "roll up our sleeves and get into the thick of everyday politics and development" (Pieterse 1996:60).

Gerkin (1991:126) says that churches around the world get frightened by the presence of the poor and marginalised. Instead of getting involved, congregations move to safer, more comfortable environments.

In a post-modern practical theology, the Christian is challenged by the Cross of Christ to live a life of love, but in order that it not be just idealism and sentimentality, this love has to be practiced in history and it has to become involved in the politics of justice (De Gruchy 1993:67).

2.4 Towards a narrative pastoral practice.

Just therapy highlights equity in relationships between people: It involves naming the structures, and the actions that oppress and destroy equality in relationships.

(Waldegrave 1990:7)

The above-mentioned structures and actions are reflected in families, and beyond that in social structures at a macro level. Just therapy, according to Waldegrave (1990:7), always has to take into account the structures and actions that oppress and destroy equality in relationships.

In order to put the above into practice, I chose a narrative pastoral practice. Talking about a narrative approach does not imply talking about stories only. Human beings are interpretive beings - we are active in the interpretation of our experiences as we live our lives (White 1995:13). We live by the stories we have about our lives. These stories are continually shaping our lives. The stories of our lives provide frames that enable us to interpret our experiences. Narrative therapy, according to White, provides a context that contributes to the exploration of other, more preferred ways of living and thinking. At the same time, narrative therapy enables

us to re-dress cultural injustice. White (1995:156) describes the tasks that people who have abused their power are faced with:

1. They have to take responsibility for perpetrating the abuse.
2. They have to develop an understanding of the experiences of those who have been subject to the abuse.
3. They have to establish a thorough appreciation of the short-term effects of the power-abuse, and also of the longer-term effects on the lives of those who were subject to it.

White says that for perpetrators to face all of the above tasks are not enough - the perpetrators (in this case White, middle-class members of the Dutch Reformed Church) have to separate themselves from the dominant ways of being and thinking that inform the abuse of power. These are those ways of being and thinking that inform, support, justify and make power abuse possible (White 1995:159). The perpetrators have to explore alternative ways of being and thinking that bring with them new proposals for action (White 1995:159). For this to be achieved, the specifics of these alternative ways of being and thinking need to be very carefully worked through (White 1995:160).

More tasks that the group that has been responsible for perpetrating the injustice has to face are:

1. Recognising that they should be accountable to those who have experienced the injustice.
2. Recognising that good intentions are not enough. Even when genuinely trying "to do the right thing", members of a dominant group are not always able to recognise when their own cultural perspective is involving them in practices that are unjust and oppressive (Aboriginal health council of South Australia 1995:35).

The narrative approach enables people to work with alternative ways of being and thinking, and helps to reveal the unstated cultural assumptions that contributed to the original construction of the abuse - in this case cultural hegemony (Monk et al 1996:8).

2.4.1 Naming the injustice

A narrative approach encouraged the group of White, middle-class people to name the injustices that occurred in South Africa in which they, as

White people, took part. *Externalising conversations* assisted the group in naming the injustice in a non-blaming way that opens up ways of taking responsibility.

According to Michael White, we always have to remember that "the problem is the problem; the person is not the problem" (Monk et al 1996:26). White (1992:126) states that a narrative therapist (or a group leader in this study) has to have an externalising attitude while deconstructing the cultural hegemony. Naming the problematic story of racism is useful in externalising the problem. Asking relative influence questions is a way to structure externalising conversations. The group was asked to map the influence that cultural hegemony has on people of colour's lives, and on their own lives. They were also asked to map their own influence on the life of cultural hegemony and racist discourses (White 1990:42).

Externalising conversations encouraged the group to identify the private stories and the cultural knowledges by which they live. The group was encouraged to separate from an abusive discourse and to orient themselves to aspects of their experience that contradict these knowledges (White 1992:127). When a group of people separate themselves from the

dominant cultural discourse, they are free to explore alternative and preferred ways of being and thinking, and of whom they might be (White 1992:126).

Externalising conversations do not take away the responsibility from the perpetrators towards the problem of abuse. In fact, this way of talking about racism enables us to assume responsibility, because we (the oppressors) become aware of, and are able to describe our relationship with the problem (White 1990:65). We always have to keep in mind that externalising language must be an attitude, and not a mere method - otherwise it can come off as forced and shallow (Freedman & Combs 1996:47).

2.4.2 Preferred ways of being and doing

In order to counteract the dominant discourse of cultural hegemony and to be able to live and act in a more preferred way, it was necessary for the group to search for *unique outcomes*.

In externalising cultural hegemony, it is helpful to identify aspects of a person's life that may not be affected by the dominant story of oppression and hegemony. These contradictions, where the dominant discourse has been counteracted, are called unique outcomes (White 1988:39). Unique outcomes provide the foundation for building a preferred or alternative account. Questions have to be asked to assist the group members to locate unique outcomes in time and place, securing them as part of a sequence, so that they are provided with meaning. Such questions are called *landscape of action questions* (White 1992:128). Examples of such questions may be: "Can you tell me when this happened?" "What steps did you take to outsmart cultural hegemony like that?" "Of all those persons who have known you, who would be the least surprised that you have been able to be so sensitive to other people's needs?" The perpetrator is invited to appreciate the significance of the unique outcomes in terms of unique redescriptions of self, others and the associated unique possibilities (White 1988:39). These questions are called *landscape of identity questions* (White 1992:131). Questions such as the following are asked: "And what does outsmarting hegemony say about you as a person?" "How do you think this spoke to them of who you are, and about what you believe to be important?" (White 1992:133). Group members take an active status in the generation of these new accounts and redescriptions. The group leader

and group members speculate about the new future attached to these unique redescriptions, and thereby new possibilities are derived (White 1988:39). Unique outcomes redefine the perpetrator's relationship with the problem (White 1988:41).

Such unique outcomes are strung together to develop the alternative account of the perpetrator and his/her abilities (Monk et al 1996:16). At this stage, the preferred way of doing is still a fragile account of events that stand in direct opposition to the problem of racial thinking (Monk et al 1996:20).

In order for the group to depart successfully from the dominant account of cultural hegemony in their lives, an audience was created to bear witness to the emergence of the members' new descriptions of themselves (Monk et al 1996:20). The stories we have about ourselves are not only stories we created, but we also learn them in conversations with significant people in our lives (Monk et al 1996:21). That is why the reaction of an audience to the perpetrator's new account is important. The group act as a listening team, providing a forum that will encourage the member's preferred redescription of him/herself. The audience can also consist of people who

are close to the perpetrator - people who side with the *person* and not with the *problem*.

Experiences of experience questions are asked to create such an audience. These questions facilitate the re-authoring of lives and relationships, and they enable a rich description of the alternative, preferred account. The questions remind the perpetrator of aspects that have been forgotten in time that will bring more unique outcomes to the front. These questions encourage persons to provide an account of what they believe or imagine to be another person's experience of them (White 1992:132). The questions are to be followed up by more landscape of action and identity questions.

We have to take note that this is not a linear process where the group and the group leader are moving from point A to point B - it is a conversation where we move from unique outcomes, to landscape questioning, back to unique outcomes, to experience of experience questions, back to unique outcomes.

2.4.3 The role of a group leader in narrative conversations about race

In a group of White people, it is important for the group leader not to speak from a separate or morally superior position. The group leader has to make it clear to the group that he/she sees him/herself as being basically part of the same culture from which the oppression has taken place (White 1995:158). If the group leader considers the group to be aberrant, he/she is in danger of negating his/her own responsibility, thus failing to take action against practices of power, but instead supporting domination. This moral superiority may cause the group leader to avoid challenging structures of oppression (White 1995:158).

Anderson and Goolishian (1992:28) state that the group leader must always position him/herself in a "not knowing" position, rather than demand specific answers to questions. The skill of the group leader is the expertise to participate in creating new meaning (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28). The group leader and the group participate in the co-development of new meaning.

White (1995:72) argues that therapists (or group leader as in this study) always have to put their "expert" knowledge in brackets. The group will then feel less imposed upon in the conversation. If a group leader has a strong opinion about what a person should or should not do, it is better to deconstruct this opinion immediately, otherwise the group may feel that they have no choice but to submit to your opinion (White 1995:69).

Curiosity can be regarded as one safeguard against the use of therapist expertise to steer the group in the direction that the group leader deems appropriate (Monk et al 1996:26). Genuine curiosity during the length of the conversation gives rise to questions that highlight new possibilities for the group to consider (Monk et al 1996:26). An attitude of curiosity enables the group leader to stay in a "not knowing" position, and it prevents him/her from moving too quickly to a "quick fix" (Monk et al 1996:26).

The group leader has to remember that narrative questions are not rhetorical or pedagogical questions (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:34). The questions the group leader asks create space, and facilitate a mode conducive to dialogue.

In chapter four, I elaborate on how I applied the narrative process in the conversations I had with the group. I will now proceed to chapter three, where I explore the part that the Dutch Reformed Church played in the history of Apartheid in South Africa.

CHAPTER 3

THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH AND ITS HISTORY WITH APARTHEID

3.1 The role of the Dutch Reformed Church since 1948

The Dutch Reformed Church sanctioned Apartheid as an ideology. Theologians such as E P Groenewald established biblical proofs for Apartheid. He said that according to the Bible, God actually called nations into existence - each with its own language and history, and that in the history of Israel one can see that God rewards people who respect Apartheid (Loubser 1987:60; 66).

In South Africa the Nationalist party came to power in a White election in 1948, promising that it would implement Apartheid. The Nationalist party had the full support of the Dutch Reformed Church (Hulley 1993:75). The government promptly passed a series of laws to put its election promise into practice: The Population Registration Act of 1950 aimed to give everyone a permanent racial classification; the Group Areas Act defined residential rights racially (Hulley 1993:76).

Resistance to the government's policies grew, and the government sought to control or eradicate resistance by passing the Suppression of Communism Act in the same year (1950). This law was refined over the years and gave arbitrary powers to the State to ban publications, organisations and persons, or place restrictions on them (Hulley 1993:76).

The point of departure in White South African politics has always been keeping power in the hand of the White minority (Kgatla 1994:207). Concepts like self-determination, separate development, trusteeship and many others were merely the White people's attempts to subjugate Black people in order to remain in power. Peace was always defined from the position of the powerful at the expense of the powerless. All these were subtle new patterns of oppression designed to replace blatant paternalism (Kgatla 1994:207).

Since 1948, there were many times that the Dutch Reformed Church insisted with the government on enforcing Apartheid. Many Apartheid laws were installed with the approval of the Dutch Reformed Church (Gaum 1997:9). Some of these laws were the Immorality Act, the Group Areas Act, and the law that forbade people of colour to attend church in a White congregation.

3.1.1 Cottesloe, December 1960

In March 1960 at Sharpeville, the South African Police fired at a demonstrating crowd, killing 69 Black people and leaving 187 wounded (Gous 1993:254). A group of Black people peacefully protested against the carrying of passes. They insisted that they wanted to hand in their passes, and that they were prepared to get arrested for that. They wanted to point out the statutory discrimination against Black people. All Black people had to carry a pass, which enabled them to live and work in only one area, determined by the government. If they were caught in another area, they were arrested. At Sharpeville, the police simply started shooting at the peaceful protesters (Pieterse 1997:8).

The Sharpeville massacre marked a turning point in the political and ecclesiastic history of struggle in South Africa. The massacre increased tensions between the English-speaking and the Dutch Reformed churches. In response to the threat by the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Joost de Blank, to withdraw his church's membership unless the World Council of Churches (WCC) expelled the Dutch Reformed Church for its continued support of Apartheid after Sharpeville, the WCC called its member

churches in South Africa to a consultation at Cottesloe in December 1960 (Gous 1993:254; Van der Watt 1987:104-118; Loubser 1987:87).

The representatives of the WCC and the eight South African member churches, including two Dutch Reformed churches (The Dutch Reformed synods of the Cape Province and the Transvaal), basically concluded that Apartheid could not be reconciled with the teachings of Scripture. After Cottesloe, a political uproar arose because of three decisions:

1. The request for political rights for people of colour.
2. The consensus that there is no Biblical foundation for the prohibition of racially mixed marriages.
3. The decision that no one may be excluded from any church on the basis of race and colour (Gous 1993:255; Gous & Crafford 1993:206-207).

Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, the then Prime Minister, immediately realised that the WCC consensus at Cottesloe pulled the theological basis for the National Party's policy of Apartheid from under their feet. In his 1961 New Year's message, he dismissed the decisions as the opinion of individuals. He drove a wedge between the official representatives of the Afrikaans

churches and the rest of the Church by indicating that the synods still had to ratify the delegates' decisions. The Dutch Reformed delegates were thus reprimanded by Verwoerd for allowing themselves to be manipulated by the WCC, and were told to recant. This most of the Dutch Reformed delegates did, thus paving the way for the Dutch Reformed Church synods of Transvaal and the Cape Province to reject the Cottesloe decisions in 1961, and to resign from the WCC and from the South African Council of Churches (Gous 1993:255; Pieterse 1997:11). This led to an ecclesiastic and theological isolation from the rest of the world for the Dutch Reformed Church (Pieterse 1997:11).

The Dutch Reformed Church maintained its position on Apartheid, which in turn enabled the government to maintain its Apartheid laws for thirty years. This caused political and economic havoc in the country. If the Dutch Reformed Church maintained the theologically sound Cottesloe decision, the government would not have been able to continue on the path of Apartheid. Afrikaners would probably have come to their senses much earlier (Pieterse 1997:10).

3.1.2 The period after Cottesloe

The vacuum after Cottesloe was eventually filled by the Christian Institute (CI), which was founded and financed with the help of Robbert Billheimer of the WCC, under the leadership of Beyers Naudé, one of the Dutch Reformed ministers who could not be forced back into the restrictive mould of Dutch Reformed thinking of that time (Gous 1993:256; Strauss 1990:358-369).

The Dutch Reformed Church was against the CI and its activities from the start. The CI ended in 1977 after being banned by the Government (Gaum 1997:22; Strauss 1990:358-369).

After Cottesloe, the Dutch Reformed Church went on to do a study on the relationships between ethnic groups in South Africa. In 1974, the synod of the Dutch Reformed Church accepted a new policy document - *Ras, volk en nasie*. In this document, the concept of neighbourly love plays a big role, but the Apartheid philosophy was still strongly advocated and justified with Scripture (Gaum 1997:24; Gous & Crafford 1993:401).

It was also in 1974 that the Department of Information presented an amount of money to the Dutch Reformed Church on a confidential basis. The government needed information from the Church about the actions of the World Council of Churches. The Dutch Reformed Church had to play the part of a "spy", so that the government could obtain counter arguments against the stream of negative propaganda, which went out from the WCC against South Africa (Gaum 1997:26).

In 1976, the Black students of Soweto revolted against being prescribed what was right for them. When this happened, the entire White power establishment used everything in its power to quell the insurrection. Consequently, on June 16th 1976 - a very sad day in the history of South Africa - many Black youths lost their lives in the struggle against Apartheid. After that day, the White Afrikaans Church, the government and White business communities were up in arms in order to crush the new movement against oppression (Kgatla 1994:206).

During the end of the 1970s, many voices from outside tried to persuade the Dutch Reformed Church to turn around and repudiate Apartheid. These voices came especially from the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. In 1978, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church accused the Dutch Reformed

Church of being the instigator of governmental and economical Apartheid. In 1980, the *Hervormingsdag-getuienis* was published. In this document, the Dutch Reformed Church was encouraged to renounce racism in the Church. Another document, *Storm-Kompas*, was published in 1981. The forty-four comments on the Dutch Reformed Church in the South African context unleashed a very uncomfortable storm in the circles of Dutch Reformed theologians. In 1982, another document was published - the *Open Letter to the Dutch Reformed Church*. One hundred and twenty-three people signed this document. Negative as well as positive reaction came from the Dutch Reformed Church (Gaum 1997:32; Gous & Crafford 1993:366).

In 1982, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church installed the *Belhar Confession* as one of their official policy documents (Gous 1993:256; Loubser 1987:148). In this confession, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church stated that they reject any ideology that would legitimate forms of injustice, and any doctrine that is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the Gospel. There was little reaction towards this confession from the side of the Dutch Reformed Church. The Dutch Reformed Church was especially uncomfortable with one statement in the confession - the one that holds that "God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the

poor and the wronged” (Loubser 1987:149). The Dutch Reformed Church argued that this statement was susceptible to serious misunderstanding (Loubser 1987:149). For many of the Dutch Reformed congregants an unqualified condemnation of the whole South African status quo still remains unacceptable (Loubser 1987:150). Until this day, the Dutch Reformed Church has been unwilling to sign the confession.

At the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1986, it was recommended that the guidelines in the Belhar Confession would be used in future discussions with the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (Loubser 1987:147). *Church and Society* was published on behalf of the Dutch Reformed Church within that year. This policy document stated that the Dutch Reformed Church declared that there are no grounds for Apartheid in Scripture whatsoever. It also stated that it was not correct for the Church to prescribe political policies to the state. Every future policy had to be tested by love and justice. This policy document was revised in 1990, when the system of Apartheid was rejected (Gaum 1997:52).

3.1.3 Rustenburg, November 1990

At Rustenburg, many church leaders came together in the spirit of a second Cottesloe. The theme was appropriately chosen: "Towards a united Christian witness in a changing South Africa." At this conference, there was a declaration by all the churches that rejected Apartheid as a sin (Gous 1993:258; Gous & Crafford 1993:207). At the conference, Prof Willie Jonker of the Dutch Reformed Church made a confession in which he repented the Church's involvement with Apartheid. This was considered a step in the right direction. Just before the closing of the conference, Professor Potgieter, the leader of the Dutch Reformed Church's delegation, publicly qualified the Dutch Reformed Church's support for only portions of the declaration that were decided upon at the conference (Gous 1993:661).

In the years to come, the Dutch Reformed Church clearly had a more reconcilable attitude, (Gous 1993:662) but in my opinion, until this day the Dutch Reformed Church has been unable to confess their wrongdoings during the time of Apartheid unconditionally. The Dutch Reformed Church

qualifies its confessions with words like: "We did have good intentions in our support to Apartheid" (Loubser 1987:149).

3.2 After the 1994-election

After the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set in place. The TRC challenged the Dutch Reformed Church to testify about the part it played in Apartheid. This challenge could have been a perfect opportunity for the Church to ask for forgiveness as a structure, as it was the Dutch Reformed Church that introduced Apartheid into church structures, establishing separate churches for members classified under Apartheid as Black people, Indian, and Coloured (Tutu 1999:224).

3.2.1 The vital role of the TRC in South Africa

The TRC challenged many structures to testify, but it was also a forum for ordinary people to tell their stories of oppression. These stories of oppression opened many people's eyes to the suffering that prevailed

under the Apartheid regime. The following quotation gives an example of such a story of an ordinary man:

Mr Sikwepere:

i heard we were about to be attacked. I ran. The place was between Crossroads and KTC.... After that I heard a loud noise. It sounded like stone hitting a sink. But I decided not to run, I decided to walk because I knew that, if you run, you were going to be shot, and so I decided: "Let me just walk to a safe place where I can start to run." But, during that time shots were being fired.... Barnard was not driving.... When I arrived at the place where I thought I was safe, I felt something hitting my cheek. I couldn't go hidden at a corner of a house. I felt my eyes itching. I was itching... my eyes. I was rubbing any further and so I stayed right there only to find out that I had my eyes but I wasn't quite sure what had happened to my eyes at the time. I felt somebody tapping on my right shoulder and I heard him saying: "get this dog for had already died." I rubbed my eyes. I was just waiting these people to take me to a prison.

Ms Gobodo-Madikizela:

Baba, are any bullets still lodged in your body?

Mr Sikwepere:

Yes, there are several of them. Some are here in my neck. You can see them on my face, you can really see them: My face feels quite rough. It feels like rough salt. I usually have terrible headaches.

Ms Gobodo-Madikizela:

Thank you, Baba.

Mr Sikwepere:

Yes, I used to be quite fat but, after that incident, I became thin. Now I am quite thin as you can see.

Ms Gobodo-Madikizela:

How do you feel, Baba, about coming here to tell us your story?

Mr Sikwepere:

I feel like that what... what has brought my sight back, my eyesight back, is to come back here and tell the story. But I feel that what has been making me sick all this time is the fact that I couldn't tell my story. But now... it feels like I've got my sight back by coming here to tell you the story.

(The TRC testimony of the blind Lucas Baba Sikwepere in Krog 1998b:6)

It was through testimonies like this that the majority of White Afrikaners could see with their very own eyes what went on during the Apartheid years. We have been confronted by people returning from the dead in the stories that have been nurtured in the hearts of many people, victims and perpetrators. Victims and perpetrators and those who thought they were just innocent bystanders, now realised their complicity, and had an opportunity to participate in each other's humanity in story form. "Each person and each community has its own history of life which is embedded in a framework of stories or narratives, which in turn is nourished by wider stories from the social and cultural context and also by the grand stories of confession, forgiveness, reconciliation and truth" (Botman 1996:37).

In a certain sense, the TRC activated a "self-otherness" in South Africa. A self-otherness results from the ability to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with self and move into a state of complete attention to others (Heshusius 1994:17). Heshusius (1994:16) says that self-otherness actually refers to a mode of consciousness, a way of being in the world, which is characterised by "allocentric" knowing. Allocentric knowing, according to Heshusius, requires a total turning to other.

The TRC's first focus was on the emotional damage and unresolved turmoil of thought and feeling of the survivors. But the overarching goal was a change in the belief and value systems that permitted torture, atrocities and human rights violations (Dowdall 1996:27). Many people, especially those who were in control during the Apartheid regime - the *Broederbond*, Afrikaner culture, the schools of Christian National education, and the churches of "sovereignty in their own circle" - were called out from behind their curtains. They heard stories that infringed on their own well-known stories (Botman 1996:38). Our (the White Afrikaans people's) horizons have consequently been broadened by the TRC's actions.

3.2.2 The TRC and the Dutch Reformed Church

Several individuals from the Dutch Reformed Church testified before the TRC about the Church's role in Apartheid. One such person was Nico Smith, a former Church minister, who was himself outspoken against Apartheid. Nico Smith testified that the complicity of the Dutch Reformed Church in the policy of Apartheid went beyond simple approval and legitimisation. Many Apartheid state operatives and executioners were in

the Dutch Reformed Church, and found positive support from the Church (Truth and reconciliation commission of South Africa 1998:66).

From the side of the military chaplaincy, Prof Dirk Human of the Dutch Reformed Church testified in a separate submission that a number of national service chaplains became very critical of some aspects of the chaplaincy, but then they came in conflict with the higher echelons in the Chaplain General's office. This was especially on issues of the Church's ideological support towards the struggle (*die basoorlog*) and the close co-operation between Church and State (Truth and reconciliation commission of South Africa 1998:72).

The Dutch Reformed Church was the church that established the theological infrastructure for the Apartheid system. Equally important is the fact that the Dutch Reformed Church was the church where several politicians, public service officials and members of the Police and Defence Force, the enforcers of Apartheid, worshipped on Sundays (Meiring 1999:20). Therefore one should expect the Dutch Reformed Church to take part in the actions of the TRC actively, and to encourage its members to confess before the commission. One should also expect the Dutch Reformed Church to be the first church to voluntarily testify and ask for

forgiveness. It would have been appropriate for the church to establish counselling structures for its members who were perpetrators, and for their families. In addition, the Dutch Reformed Church should have led all its members who had also been immersed in a crisis, who faced the mirror of our history, on the road to confession and reconciliation (Meiring 1999:61).

Instead of taking responsibility for the above, the Dutch Reformed Church was concerned about the fairness of the TRC. The Church was sceptical about the TRC's effort of assuring and convincing people that it would not degenerate into a witch-hunt (Meiring 1999:61). I do not think that White Afrikaners, and the Afrikaans churches were prepared for the shocking history that unfolded in front of them through the TRC. People were shocked and appalled. The TRC even received negative letters from Afrikaans individuals, in reaction to their shock. An example of such a letter is one that was sent from the Western Transvaal:

We detest the TRC and its methods. It is only Afrikaners who must confess.... We must confess before a godless government's creation. They do not believe in the True Trinity. You are playing judge and want to bring reconciliation. With whom? You must also go and

confess your sins at the right place. It is nice to receive such a fat cheque, while people suffering from hunger and unemployment is the order of the day.

(Meiring 1999:95)

When the TRC invited the faith community to testify, Freek Swanepoel, the moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church at the time, agreed to go. Not everybody in the Church was happy that he was standing there. He said that he could not say that he was speaking on behalf of the entire Dutch Reformed Church. Freek Swanepoel admitted the Church's mistakes, and asked for forgiveness unconditionally. He said that there had been a time when the church spoke authoritatively in society. That time was over. He said that the Church had learnt that it would have to act as a servant, as did its Lord (Meiring 1999:278).

There are many members of the Dutch Reformed Church who are truly sorry about what happened in the past, and these people are trying to make a difference. But sadly, the Dutch Reformed Church's members were divided in their opinion on the TRC from the start.

The Church commissioned Fritz Gaum to publish a document - *Die Verhaal van die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk se Reis met Apartheid* (1997) -

which was supposed to serve as a confession and a testimony about the Church's involvement with Apartheid. In my opinion, this document is not an unconditional confession. It consists of too many excuses of why the Church supported Apartheid, and each confession in the document is strictly qualified.

3.2.3 The period after the TRC

During the last few years, South Africans achieved many successes that are truly wonderful. However, I would like to try to give you a glimpse of South Africa today as it is seen through the eyes of different groups within South Africa itself. There are many categories in which one can place various South Africans, but I agree with Anthony Balcomb (1998:56) when he describes the opinions of five groups of people in South Africa, as they see themselves in the New South Africa. I will name these groups, but then I would finally like to add a sixth group:

1. The new political elite

These are the people who are very happy with the situation. They will include the new political and economic elite. Posh cars, posh

houses, and posh salaries are the order of the day. Many key church leaders, who were part of the liberation struggle, are part of this new elite (Balcomb 1998:56).

2. The would-be political elite

Secondly, we find those who have not managed to catch the gravy train but who are still running desperately alongside it as it pulls out of the station. The gravy train offers possibilities of immediate enrichment in the exiting corridors of power (Balcomb 1998:57).

3. The marginalised who refuse

Thirdly, we find people who have decided that they would never be able to get onto the gravy train. This group of people is frustrated and angry at the fact that they are clearly being left behind. They have decided to join the growing masses of the disinherited who are making their living through crime (Balcomb 1998:57).

4. The previously privileged

The fourth group consists of those people who long for the "good old days" of Apartheid. They are against everything that involves a new, democratic South Africa. For them, everything has gone wrong. The

country, in their opinion, is falling apart. These are the people who were previously the privileged. They are those who, by virtue of the colour of their skin, were able to access the best of everything that society could offer (Balcomb 1998:58). Many Dutch Reformed Church members find themselves in this group.

5. The marginalised who accept

For this fifth group very little has changed. While expectations have been raised, they have not been met. Their economical situation remains the same. All they can do is to continue to put in an honest day's work, and hope that their union (if they belong to one) will be able to improve their lot. Either that or they must get on with things, not expecting the goods to be delivered, and use their own initiative and survival skills to make a living. This group constitutes the overwhelming majority of people in South Africa today (Balcomb 1998:58).

6. The previously privileged whose eyes were opened

I want to add a sixth group to Balcomb's five: This group will usually be counted with the previously privileged for whom everything has gone wrong. They are the few who are usually overlooked, because

we never hear from them. They followed the TRC's actions through the media, and their eyes were opened. They feel shocked and ashamed. They truly want to make a contribution to the healing of South Africa, but they do not know where to begin. We never hear their voices, because they do not know what to do. It seems that they are overwhelmed by the immenseness of their own guilt, and by the huge challenges that are facing them. They feel trapped by their own powerlessness. Many members of this group also find themselves in the Dutch Reformed Church.

The majority of the group with which I had narrative conversations can be counted with the sixth category. It was essential for this particular group of people to be empowered, so that their voices could be heard in their communities and congregation, in order for them to open the eyes of the previously privileged who refuse to take part in the healing process.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACISM

Before we started our conversations, the group members had to read the book, *Country of my skull* (1998a), which Antjie Krog wrote about her experience as a SABC radio reporter who covered the proceedings of the TRC.

Krog's book is an intensely personal narrative, interwoven with the narratives of men and women - both sufferers of human rights abuses - who testified to the TRC. For many people in South Africa, following the coverage of the TRC hearings in the media was a painful coming-to-terms with the complex truth of a country and a people divided by Apartheid.

To Krog, her term as a radio reporter on the TRC was an opportunity for her personal search through the many aspects of the old South African reality, in order to come to a new South African reality and identity, as the country was (and still is) moving from Apartheid to a new moral system, based on human rights for all (Van Schalkwyk 1998:439).

Country of my skull gives an honest account of what took place in South Africa during the years of Apartheid. The narratives in Krog's book are written in such a way that the reader can experience the harsh truth of the pain that racism and Apartheid caused many people. The conversations within our group were structured around the book - every week the group members had to prepare a section of the book, which we subsequently discussed.

The group found the book frightening, and the group members read the book over a period of time in small magnitudes. Comments like: "This book is too harsh", or "It is too painful to read", were common in the group. One group member bought the book long before this project, but she never had the courage to finish it. Another group member, who always thought that she was an enlightened, liberal person, got so angry with Antjie Krog, that she had to stop reading for a while.

As we discussed the difficulties of reading the book, one group member remarked: "I am not used to reading the truth like this. No Afrikaans book ever spelled out the truth in such a manner. I have read similar books and articles before, but the truth was always alleviated. Maybe we are not used to having our eyes opened like that. In our schools, churches, and

other Afrikaans institutions, the truth is always subdued - we are used to hear and read only half of the truth." As we discussed this statement, it became clear that most Afrikaans people grew up in a protected environment. Even the media never revealed the whole truth. Afrikaans people, including this group, do not have the stomach to come face to face with a truth that is not "softened", or adapted a little.

The group member who got angry with Antjie Krog became upset about the foul language used in the book. She also stated: "The language and the presentation of the book is not Christian - the whole climate of the book is heinous." Not everyone in the group agreed with this statement. Another group member said: "This is precisely what White people, who call themselves Christian, do - we pretend to be such good people in our churches and in public. If we read books that contain foul language, we say that it is against our Christian upbringing, but when we are at home, we use the same language." Two other group members agreed. They were of the opinion that we (Afrikaners) live two different lives - the public life with high moral standards where everything is subdued and polite, and on the other hand, our private lives where we forget about morals - where husbands beat their wives, and where swearing forms part of our day-to-day language. The group agreed that when we recognise ourselves in a

book or an article and we do not like what we see, we become angry with the author. In retrospect, I wonder if this discussion about the harsh language in the book may have been a distraction away from the reality of the abuse.

From the start there were strong emotions among the group members about the book, and that is precisely why I wanted them to read *Country of my skull*. I wanted them to read the book so that the group could be strengthened to face the truth about Apartheid and abuse. I also hoped that the truth about Apartheid and abuse would challenge them to take responsibility, and to resume a life that is more ethical, culturally sensitive and just.

4.1 Naming the injustices

Antjie Krog's book assisted the group in naming the injustices of the past. We discussed the injustices in an externalising way. Plotting the influence and devastation of racism, we discussed the following questions: "How did racism inflict pain on the country?" "What injustices have been done to people by prejudices and stereotyping?"

These questions let the emotions in the group flame up again. As the group members reflected on these questions, they became very upset with themselves and with the situation in which our country finds itself. As one group member remarked: "I do not want to be a part of the Afrikaans - speaking community anymore." The emotions in each group member shifted from anger towards themselves to despair and distress, as well as anger towards the Afrikaner leaders and the Church.

The general injustices identified by the group were the laws of Apartheid, violence, gross human rights violations, cultural hegemony and oppressive practices such as forced removals and restrictive labour laws. They described the effects of these injustices on people of colour - unemployment, poverty, homelessness, imprisonment and the destruction of their communities. To recognise these injustices and the effects it had on the people in our country was overwhelming for the group. The narratives in Krog's book had an effect of a participatory consciousness on the group members. They actually became part of the narratives. Heshusius (1994:16) says that a participatory consciousness requires a profound openness and receptivity, where there is a "total turning to" other.

The group also recognised that the entire unjust discourse that prevailed in our country for many years had a major effect on them. They recognised that they, as White people, played a part in this discourse by condoning it, by associating with it, by turning a blind eye to the injustices, by believing all the lies that went with the injustices, by buying into the dominant discourse of silence, and by making excuses for the part they, as White people, played in maintaining the dominant discourse of cultural hegemony. An example of the part White Afrikaners played in maintaining the dominant discourse of cultural hegemony, is a remark of one of the group members: "We were always stereotyping Black people. We saw them as dangerous."

The group recognised that they, as individual White people, played a role in all of the above injustices. More specific injustices which the group identified as having played a major part in their own lives were highlighted - insensitivity, silence, and a dominant religious discourse that supported Apartheid.

4.1.1 Insensitivity and selfishness

The group in general agreed that cultural hegemony and the privileged lives they enjoyed as White people caused them to think and act insensitively towards people of colour.

After reading the article *Albert Namatjira - my family, racism and me* (Trudinger 1996:17-24), which makes people aware that being White means to be privileged to the disadvantage of people of Colour, and that systems of power in society cause cultural hegemony, the group realised that the injustices of the past, together with the Western culture which was dominant in our country, taught White people to think and act in a selfish, insensitive manner. One group member argued that she realised now how White people have learnt to uphold the mentality of "everyone for him/herself: " We never cared about the circumstances in which people in the townships lived, as long as our children were safe and happy."

I asked the group if they could think of reasons why this mentality of selfishness became a part of White people's lives. A forty-five year old man answered: "I, a White male in South Africa, had a good, wealthy

lifestyle, with good education, health services, housing and a job during the years of Apartheid. I did not want to give all that up in order to do something about the position of Black people.” The other group members agreed with him, and one woman added the following comment: “This wealthy lifestyle caused us to forget how to take care of people, and what it is to be taken care of by other people.”

I asked the group to discuss the effects of this mentality of insensitivity and selfishness on their actions towards people of Colour. The entire group agreed that they were ashamed to realise how this mentality caused them to dehumanise and belittle Black people without even realising it. One group member added: “I am ashamed to say that even when I meant to do good, insensitivity caused me to encounter Black people in a patronising manner. It made me fall into the trap of false generosity.” A woman participant told us how she realised how patronising it was when she tried to teach her Black housekeeper about God without even finding out about her living conditions. This was an example of how ordinary Afrikaans people considered even their religion superior to that of Black people, with no consideration to a person's everyday needs.

Another woman participant in the group said that she only realised through the reading of the book and the article how insensitivity and selfishness made her turn a blind eye to the injustices that occurred in South Africa. She said: "I never thought about the pain that Apartheid caused people, because I was too busy with my own affairs." We talked about being blinded by our own needs and the effect thereof on our relationship with people of Colour. The group agreed with a member when he reflected on the effects of this insensitivity on people of Colour: "I know now that people of colour must feel such anger towards us."

4.1.2 Addressing a culture of silence

The culture of silence prevailed at a time in our country's history (1960-1989) when seven thousand people died as a result of political violence (Meiring 1999:146). The silence reminded me of the words of Martin Niemöller (a German submarine commander in the First World War), quoted by Meiring (1999:132):

First they came for the Socialists and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the

Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me.

The silence of White Christians in South Africa is in sharp contrast to South African Jews who comprised a large portion of the Whites involved in left-wing politics in South Africa (Frankel 1999:48).

The words of Beyers Naudé, quoted by Meiring (1999:157), ring true when I experienced our reflection on our silence. Naudé said:

We, who were supposed to be the conscience of the nation, did not succeed in preventing the most serious forms of abuse of the human conscience.

The culture of silence is not just the absence of speaking out against intimidation and repression. It is a complex mixture of fear and avoidance that is often entangled with confused ideas of the regime's propaganda (Dowdall 1996:31).

Torture and human rights violations are meant to be known by all, but spoken of by none. In a country like South Africa, White people were

taught to take for granted that safety lay in silence, and that speaking out or asking questions were dangerous (Dowdall 1996:31).

In his own confession to the TRC, Nico Horn (pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission) gave a summary of the reasons why most White Christians found themselves in the hands of silence:

I confess my horrible fear in the old days. Fear that the Afrikaners would eventually reject me; fear that the rejection would take my ministry away from me; fear that nobody would listen to me any longer and that my congregation would be going under; fear that my children would be harrassed at school and at clubs. I confess that my fear had often forced me to compromise, like the time when two hot-tempered men resigned from Krugersdorp's church council because Joseph and Johannes attended our services. I had promised the church council quite formally that I would not encourage the brothers and sisters of our missionary congregation to attend our services. Though I could not sleep for weeks after making this promise, I never withdrew.

(Meiring 1999:158)

In our conversations, it became clear that silence played a devastating role in the White, Afrikaner culture. A male member argued that he as a White

Afrikaner had been brought up in such a way as not to question anything: "We have been taught to listen when our parents, teachers and Church leaders speak. We have been taught that we could trust the authorities and the establishment - that they would never make mistakes."

We talked about the disempowering effect of this silence, and we realised that silence caused us never to criticise the establishment. One person in the group remembered a newspaper in the Cape Province, which made people aware of the injustices that took place in South Africa, but this paper was closed down after a short while. She made the following statement: "People who, and organisations that made their voices heard about what happened in the country, were immediately silenced."

When I asked the group about the effects of silence, one group member pointed out that silence caused her to ignore injustice - the same as insensitivity and selfishness. Another group member said: "White Afrikaners, and that includes myself, never learnt how to take a stand against silence. I am too scared to speak out." Another group member said that our culture taught us that we must keep quiet if we disagree with anyone: "We are afraid that we will annoy people if we take a stand against silence." Reflecting on this, we wondered what it implied about us

that we did not stand up against silence. It became clear that naivety prevailed in our lives. This conversation made me realise that silence ensures safety to the abuser.

Botman (1996:39) says that White people applied silence to their own children and spouses. Subsequently, their own children became blind, deaf and mute to the issues of contextuality, justice and liberation. In fact, they lost sight of the truth in their own country.

However, the group realised that since 1994 after Apartheid, they still remained silent. This situation was aggravated by the former Apartheid leaders' approach to denial and silence. One group member got angry when he said: "Instead of speaking out, the master brains behind Apartheid, and the White leaders of the Apartheid regime kept silent. The National Party and the *Broederbond* kept their silence before the TRC. I know that it will take a long time for the culture of silence to stop if the leaders of the community, including the church leaders, refuse to break the silence." Reflecting on this, we questioned the idea of waiting for the leaders to take responsibility and action.

I gave the group the article *On hearing and lamenting*, written by Denise Ackermann (1996b: 47-56) to read, in order to enable us to talk about the devastating consequences of silence on a community. In this article, Ackermann quotes Rabbi Bunam when he says:

The sins which man [sic] commits - these are not his [sic] greatest crime. The great crime of man [sic] is that he [sic] can turn at every moment, and does not do so. By choosing not to know, by knowing a little and saying: What's the use of protesting anyway?

Ackermann (1996b:49) states that by "screaming too softly", we deliberately choose powerlessness and apathy. The dominant Whites and those who supported them in the old regime were hardly without power, specifically power over people, and political and economical power. Yet they lacked moral and spiritual power, that collaborative energy which engages us personally and communally with God and with one another in such a way that power becomes synonymous with the vitality of living fully and freely.

The group stated that they, as individuals, were still in the claws of silence. After they had read and heard the full story of what happened in

South Africa, they were still not able to talk about it. It seemed as if the truth about our country was too overwhelming for the group to talk about. One woman said: "I want to make a difference, I want to talk to other White people about the injustices of racism, but I cannot, because I do not know how."

I asked them what they thought would happen if they continued to play into the hands of silence. They gave it some thought, and then a group member answered: "White people will still go on living in an apathetic manner, everything will stay the same - there will be no progress in the healing process." Another group member agreed and remarked that cultural hegemony would prevail in the White community, and the healing of our country would suffer tremendously if White people kept silent. A woman in the group aired her opinion: "I realise that it is our duty to talk about racism and cultural hegemony to our families, friends and colleagues." The group recognised the numbing effects of silence, and they knew they could not keep on playing into the hands of silence.

4.1.3 A twisted theology

Neels du Plooy (in Meiring 1999:186), who had served as chaplain for fourteen years, says that the Afrikaans churches in particular had apparently accepted the government's war efforts unconditionally. He gave the following statement to the TRC:

It is only now that churchgoers are asking, in retrospect, how it was possible that everything felt so right those days. The Church gave us that assurance, and yet the Church is now only prepared to say: "Sorry, we were wrong to support and justify Apartheid." The Church followed the lead of the National Party government and that of the Defence Council in defence matters. This total involvement was intensified through the now discredited concept of a "total onslaught." The Church had to become involved in winning the hearts and the minds of the people. The Church was wholly convinced that we had been fighting a just war. Even when conscripts were expected to do duty in townships - and some graduate national servicemen were strongly opposed to it - the Church never raised a word of protest. Protest was dismissed as disloyalty.

Many anti-Apartheid activists read the Bible through from cover to cover while in solitary confinement. In contrast to churchgoers in White

Afrikaans churches, the Bible taught them that it was worthwhile to pay dearly for the sake of truth and justice. The Bible gave them courage, and helped them to keep on hoping (Meiring 1999:223). Afrikaans churchgoers did not want to read the Bible with the activists. The reason for this was that the Afrikaans churchgoers thought activists always chose the wrong bits in the Bible, and that they read it through communist spectacles (Meiring 1999:223).

Our group discussed the theology of the Dutch Reformed Church with which they grew up. When we investigated the part that the Church played in the oppression and injustice done to the oppressed, one group member made the following comment: "I know the theology in our church must have some good points in it, but I also realise it caused many problems in our country." The youngest group member got aggressive as we talked about the Church and our theology. It became clear that he was very upset with the Church and the part it played in Apartheid: "I think that our church and theology were greatly influenced by a patriarchal world view." Denise Ackermann (1996b:51) states that patriarchy is a pervasive social system of male dominance that rests on fear of loss, and it results in uncaring and unaware attitudes.

Another member stated that she thought this patriarchal theology had its starting point in South Africa when missionaries came to the country during the period of Colonialism, and she thought this theology to be "a hard, rigid theology, that does not say much about the love of God for the suffering humanity."

When I asked the group about the ramifications of such a dominant theology in South Africa, one group member answered: "Instead of living in and through the love of God, we started to categorise and condemn people who did not share our views."

A woman in her early fifties was outraged when she made the following remark: "Racism and Christianity actually oppose one another. I cannot believe that any Christian church could condone Apartheid and racism, and, worst of all - I did nothing about such a twisted theology!" A male group member argued that our image of God became twisted during the Apartheid years: "We believed in an exclusive God, whose favourite children were middle class, White men in the Dutch Reformed Church. We came to understand Christ in terms of rigid rules and regulations, and we condemned anyone who believed differently." He continued: "We only looked at the Old Testament stories about Israel who would move into a

country and 'clear it up.' We thought we were Israel. This made us blind for the actual message of Christ - which is love." The group agreed that this dominant religious discourse damaged their understanding of life itself, their beliefs and their relationships with other people.

All the group members were very disappointed in the Church, and disappointed in themselves for not realising the unjust theology. They asked the same question that David Bosch (1991:88) once asked: "Was the Afrikaner church, in its religion, busy to worship itself?"

A woman in the group remarked: "I know the Church realises that it has made a mistake, but I long for more guidance from the Church in the present time. I think that most church leaders once again find themselves in the hands of silence."

Botman (1996:38) calls this silence of most White Church leaders "metaphorical locking devices." Silence or "metaphorical locking devices" were used to close the debate rather than opening concrete issues to public discussion. Botman (1996:38) says that once an issue was pronounced "sensitive and emotional", we all knew it actually meant:

"let's not talk about it any further or allow any further discussion on the matter."

The group members realised that at present this silence still prevails in the Church. As one member stated: "Today, as in the past, ministers are silent. It seems that they are too scared to talk about issues of justice." Botman (1996:38) states that it is still the case that nobody is allowed to address the issues that lay behind the silence. Pastors and ministers are silent; issues of justice in their churches are made invisible, and many congregations are still prophetically blind, deaf and mute. Members of churches where silence is dominant often find it difficult, if not impossible, to relate to others and the otherness in people. Silence not only locks others out, it also locks oneself or one's own group in (Botman 1996:38).

4.2 The effects of naming the injustices

To come face to face with some of the injustices of the past was very difficult for the group. Even more difficult than facing the injustices were naming them. The discussions were painful, and despair tried its best to

overshadow the conversations. The effects on the group while naming the injustices were shock, shame, guilt, silence, uncertainty and despair. These feelings were stages that alternated one another during the conversations. In retrospect, I realise that it was necessary for the group to experience these feelings in order to arrive at a point where they could take responsibility, and subsequently take action against injustice in their own lives.

4.2.1 Shock

Some of the group members were, at first shocked to the extent that they tried to distance themselves from the Afrikaners who committed gross human rights violations. One woman described her reaction to the torture that took place in the following way: "When I read about the torture, I even tried to make myself believe that the torturers were not White Afrikaners. I tried to persuade myself that the people whom I read about in *Country of my skull*, did not have Afrikaans names." This woman was a mouthpiece for the whole group when she commented that she could not believe that her own people could be so cruel. One implication of the shock was that the group got angry. They even got upset with Antjie Krog, the author of the book. A fifty-five year old woman commented: "Antjie Krog has a very harsh manner of saying things." One of the

group members felt angry with the TRC. He stated that the commissioners who were working for the TRC, were not soldiers - they were all spiritual leaders, lawyers and judges: "The commissioners want to condemn people whom they do not understand - they were not with the soldiers when it all took place." The rest of the group was taken aback to hear this man's point of view. One woman rebuked him by saying: "The commissioners are people who stood right in the middle of the struggle for freedom - they were the ones who were affected most!"

Alex Boraine (1998:45) confirms that many people in South Africa got angry with the TRC. He says that the people who got angry, were so shocked with the truth that they got angry with the people bringing them the information.

Another effect of the shock was denial. The group members knew that all the gross human rights violations really happened. Yet at first some of them denied the fact that they were part of the injustices. The fifty-five year old woman tried to exonerate herself by stating: "I did not have a part in the pain caused by Apartheid - I knew all along that we were wrong, but nobody listened to me." Another group member asked her if she realised that she was only denying the fact that she was just as guilty as the rest of the Afrikaners. She thought about

this, and she confessed that she was in denial because the truth was so blatantly shocking.

We discussed the extent of the shock the group went through, and I asked them to list some of the effects that shock had on them. One or two of the group members argued that shock caused them to deny their part in the injustices. Other group members stated that the shock made them feel anger towards everyone, especially towards themselves. One group member said: "I am outraged because I realise how arrogant we were to think we could play with people's lives like that." Another group member had a sober approach to the shock: "It is painful to have such emotions, but I know it is something I have to go through in order to make a new, more ethical beginning."

4.2.2 Shame and guilt

Shame and guilt were further effects on the group when naming the injustices. Questions the group asked themselves over and over again were: "Why couldn't we see that something was wrong? Why were our parents and we blind to the injustices?" These types of questions made it clear to me that identifying the injustices elicited a feeling of intense shame. In addition to the shame the group members experienced guilt and remorse as well.

I asked them what aspects of the past spoke the most of shame and guilt. One group member answered: "I feel ashamed when I read about the torture, detention without trial and intimidation that took place under the hands of Afrikaans people." Another member added: "I feel ashamed because I am part of the White, Afrikaans community." The rest of the group agreed with him, and argued that they were ashamed to be called Afrikaners. All the group members agreed with one man when he said: "I feel the most guilt when I think about how blind I was. I did not know what was going on, and I should have made it my business to find out." All the group members felt shame and guilt because, in another member's words: "How could I be so selfish to see Black people suffering and do nothing about it? I did not even notice that the situation in our country was extremely abnormal."

One group member asked the question: "How can I ever speak to people again? How can I look them in the eyes? I feel too guilty, and I am ashamed." I could identify with this woman's statement. I shared my own feelings of shame and guilt with the group. I told them about an experience I had shortly after reading Krog's book: I attended a church service at a congregation in a township. After the service, the friendly Black congregants came to talk to my partner and me. Shame and guilt overwhelmed me at that moment, and it had a numbing effect on me. I could not utter one word because I felt too ashamed. I stood there like

the proverbial salt pillar, because shame and guilt silenced me. My partner had to do all the talking. I do not know what the people thought of me, if only they knew how ashamed I was!

The more the group and I struggled with feelings of guilt and shame, the more we discovered that it was imperative for us as perpetrators to experience shame and guilt after we had faced the injustices, for only then could we take action and start living ethical lives.

I agree with Denise Ackermann (1996b:52) when she argues that *lament* is a crucial step in reconciliation. She says that people will point out that lament is the prerogative of the suffering victims, but that repentant Whites also need to cry out to God for deliverance from our murky past and for healing from the wounds that oppressors inflict on themselves (1996b:52). I explained this statement to the group in order for them to realise that these feelings of shame and guilt were important steps in the process towards total healing.

4.2.3 Silence and despair

At one stage the group members realised that they had to take action. They wanted to correct their wrongdoings. Unfortunately, together with this feeling of responsibility, distress, despair and silence also appeared on the scene.

The silence was a different type of silence than turning a blind eye to injustice. This silence was actually a numbing, despairing, powerless silence. A group member despairingly stated: "There is so much to do, but I feel all alone. The people I encounter at work, at church - even my friends - do not care enough to even talk about these issues." Two other group members said: "It is as if a huge mountain is standing in front of us, and we do not know how to deal with it." The group felt their hands tied, especially when they talked to their friends and families who could not recognise and understand the role White people had to play in the process of healing our country. All this made it possible for silence to catch up with the group again.

The group did not know how to take action. They thought it was impossible for them to break the silence. One woman in the group argued: "on the one hand, my friends ignore me when I talk to them about the injustice of cultural arrogance. On the other hand, I feel as if I cannot dare to reach out to black

people. I am afraid that if I should speak to my black colleagues about this, it will appear as if I am patronising and falsely generous.” The group members were also scared that Black people would never accept them, and they felt too ashamed to reach out to Black people.

The group once again got angry with the Church. Many of them agreed when a fellow member said: “If the Church stood up to silence, and if the Church made an effort to reach out, it would be a lot easier for us as individuals to do the same.” Another group member followed suit: “The Dutch Reformed Church has no credibility, because the Church will not even make an effort to reunite with the Black and Coloured churches that are part of the Dutch Reformed family.”

At this stage, the feeling of distress among the group members was so powerful, that it almost ruined our discussions. One woman in the group got so overwhelmed by despair and distress that she decided not to attend our discussions anymore. In retrospect, I think that this part of the conversations was the most painful. The whole atmosphere was depressing. Despair also caught up with me, the group leader. I wondered if we would ever come to a point where the group realised that we had the power to stand up against the numbing silence, and that we had the responsibility to speak out and take action.

extremely negative about the Church, commented: "Large structures, in my experience, are usually all about showing off, instead of really doing the work." Another group member agreed: "I feel sceptical about change and action coming from organised structures - I think it is time for ordinary people like ourselves to make the change and to take action." A young man in the group added: "Sincere change and healing can only come from people like us." The rest of the group argued that change would be authentic only when it started with ordinary people on a small scale in the community. They agreed that this would be the only way to fight false generosity.

As we talked about taking action, the group got excited, but they still did not know where to start. We still had to work through silence, and we had to find subjugated knowledges in our religion.

4.2.5 Standing up against silence

Mapping the influence of silence on the group members made it clear that it had a numbing effect on us. Silence's strategy is to bar people from taking action. The fact that the group felt they could not break through the silence made them feel miserable. Silence had a disheartening effect on me too. I decided that it

was time to look for unique outcomes (White 1988:39). Fortunately, looking for unique outcomes had an empowering effect on the group.

In order to discover the unique outcomes, I asked questions such as: "Can you think of a time in the past when you succeeded in standing up against silence - times when you could stand up against injustice?" The group members could not think of any such times - it seemed as if despair even barred their memories.

The only thing I felt able to do at the time was to persist in questioning them about standing up against silence. After a lot of thinking and despairing, one woman began to tell us about her small success. Although her story was very modest, it opened up a whole new dimension in our conversations, and supported the other members to remember small steps of resistance.

The woman told us: "I have a family member who acted in a very racist manner. He always spoke in a dismissive way about former President Mandela, also in front of my children. I decided not to keep quiet, although I knew that speaking out could easily disturb the peace. Every time he visited my home, I rebuked him when he said racist things. I said quite firmly that if he wanted to visit our family, I would not allow him to talk in such a manner. I also insisted that he had to speak about Mister Mandela with respect. Every time, he would leave my

house very annoyed, but he would always come back. The last time I heard from him, was when he phoned me and asked if he could borrow my copy of the biography of Mister Mandela, because he wanted to know more. I think that standing up against silence and injustice paid off in a small way.”

In order to enrich this account of a woman standing up against silence, I asked a lot of landscape of action and landscape of identity questions (White 1992:128). An example of a question I asked her is: “Do you think your children were surprised at how you stood up against silence? Or do you think that they would have expected such actions from you?” She told the group that her children would have expected that from her, because she always taught them to treat other people justly, she taught them the values she stood for.

From this modest story, we were able to explore a whole alternative account of being just, sensitive and ethical. I went further and asked her about her methods of raising her children. She told us: “I always expect my children to be honest, fair and just to people. I do not want them to think of themselves as superior to others.” I proceeded to question her about her own upbringing, about her own sense of justice, and the person who taught her these values. She explained that her father always taught her to be fair and just. During the Apartheid years, it was unthinkable for Black and White people to drink tea from the same cups.

Former President Nelson Mandela describes an incident in his own life that demonstrates this:

That first morning at the firm, a pleasant young White secretary took me aside and said: "Nelson, we have no colour bar here at the law firm.... In honour of your arrival, we have purchased two new cups for you and Gaur.... I will call you when the tea comes and then you can take your tea in the new cups." I was grateful for her ministrations, but I knew that the two new cups she was so careful to mention were evidence of the colour bar she said did not exist. The secretaries might share tea with two Africans, but not the cups with which to drink it.

(Mandela 1994:67)

The woman who told her story to the group said she grew up on a farm. This was during the heydays of Apartheid, and her father had the courage to resist against the unethical laws, even if it was in a small way. "In those days it was unusual for Black and White people to drink a cup of tea while visiting each other. My father did not conform to such ideas - he always thought of his study to be a multicultural study. Everyone was welcome there, and could drop by to drink a cup of tea and talk. That is where I have learnt to treat other people with respect."

It was interesting to recognise private domains of resistance in this woman's story. I think that many Afrikaans people can tell similar stories of resistance, but that does not take away the fact that desperately few White Afrikaners resisted in public.

This woman's story inspired courage into the rest of the group members. One by one they started to tell about their modest victories in standing up against silence.

The youngest group member told us about a colleague who stopped telling racist jokes in front of him, because "I decided that I could not keep quiet anymore." We all realised that these narratives would ostensibly seem insignificant in other people's eyes, but we also knew that working through these stories could in future give us the courage to publicly stand up against injustice.

The group member who directed his anger at the TRC at the beginning of our conversations, remembered a time when he was younger and still studying at a college: "Apartheid was in its heyday at the time, and I came from the countryside where people were very conservative in their actions and thoughts. During my studies, I made friends with a Black person and I

took him home with me for the holidays (his parents lived far away). Although it was forbidden then, I took my Black friend with me to the White restaurants and introduced him to my other White friends. We had a real good time. We stayed friends for years, although the residents in my hometown almost rejected me for that.”

As he told us his story, the group wondered how many students would at the time have had the courage to stand up against silence like that young man did. I kept on asking landscape of action and landscape of identity questions such as: “Where did you learn not to be afraid of what people might think of you? What does that say about your sense of justice?” We explored in the group how this resistance spoke of his preferred way of being in the world. In this regard, we wondered who would not be surprised to learn that he stood up to silence.

To the reader, these narratives may seem modest and insignificant - even patronising towards Black people. But these narratives of people who uncovered descriptions of how they were not numbed by silence in the past, were very important for our conversations. These modest narratives opened up new ways for the group members to take a stand against injustice and ongoing racism in their communities in the future.

Some of the group members could not recall times when they succeeded in standing up against silence. They listened as we went on discovering rich accounts and new ways of thinking and being. Such narratives encouraged those people to *create* their own stories of standing up against silence. Each of them went home and they searched for situations where they could stand up and take action. At the next conversation they would come back, and tell us about their experiences.

One woman who always seemed shy and reserved, told us how she started talking with her Black colleagues about the injustices of Apartheid. This was something she had never done in her life. She was too scared and shy to do that. She told her colleagues about what she read in *Country of my skull*, and about how ashamed she felt: "My colleagues were amazed when they found out that before the TRC, I did not know half of what was going on in the country. They thought every White person always knew about everything. I was very cautious not to sound patronising while speaking to my Black colleagues. I know that I cannot expect them to be my friends all of a sudden." In conversing honestly with her Black colleagues, the woman realised that silence caused people to work side by side, not knowing where they stood with each other, and that this led to mistrusting one another. Silence invited more silence and distance. We

talked about how she took the steps, and what it said about the person she wanted to be.

Two other group members, who were married, decided to stand up against silence in their weekly Bible study group. When it was their turn to present the Bible study one evening, they decided to talk about racism and cultural hegemony. As this was always seen as an emotional topic, and because they knew people would definitely not be open for such a discussion, they were uncertain and scared. They knew that this was an extremely sensitive matter to some White Afrikaners. "We were scared that people would walk out of the meeting. We did not know what to expect, but we went through with the discussion." In the group, we talked about these two member's commitment, now that they knew about the effects of racism.

It turned out that the people attending their Bible study meeting were excited about the topic: "Afterwards, the people said they needed to talk about it, as nobody ever dared to talk about it anywhere." The meeting went on until the early hours of the morning, and eventually people from whom they least expected it told them how grateful they were for the enriching meeting.

We discussed the steps these two group members had to take in order to stand up against silence, and I asked some landscape of identity questions. They argued that: "One large step we had to take was to pluck up the courage and take the risk that we could annoy our friends. Now that we took that risk, we know we will have courage to stand up against silence in the future. We do not feel so powerless anymore."

Towards the end of the conversations about ethical and sensitive ways of being and doing, the group was very excited about the task they had in South Africa. They realised that silence and its numbing effects did not have a hold on them anymore.

The group realised that to stand up against silence could be difficult at times, and that despair could take its toll on people in South Africa, but they also realised that it was crucial for them to take a stand against silence. One group member argued: "We cannot wait for the Church and for other people to take action first. We have to take that responsibility or otherwise our country will never be healed."

All the group members agreed that, although they were still disappointed with the Dutch Reformed Church as a structure, it did not make them feel

hopeless anymore. Telling their own stories and listening to those of others gave them hope to continue and to work harder. They realised that they as individuals could speak out and start mobilising their church and community. It was not necessary to wait for large structures to organise spectacular projects. What they wanted to do was start working on a smaller scale. One group member said that if more people would stand up to silence in our communities, more and more voices would be heard in the future. For obvious reasons, this will inevitably be difficult. We realised that despair would try to silence us again, but we also realised that we had to persist in speaking out, no matter what.

At the final meeting, we talked about the future and about further steps the group could take. The group stated that they wanted to do their best to talk to other people - friends, family, fellow Church members and colleagues - about the evilness of racism and cultural hegemony. They also wanted to inform people about unjust dominant discourses in society. One of the group members was planning a weekly reading group where such issues would be discussed.

4.2.6 Exposing the role of subjugating dominant discourses in our religion

Dominant discourses, or institutionalisation helps individuals and societies maintain and disseminate hard-won knowledge, but it can blind us to other possibilities (Freedman & Combs 1996:24). In the Afrikaans churches, many subjugating discourses about the Bible inciting racism and injustice existed. In our discussions, we exposed such discourses in order to see other possibilities. I asked questions that Freedman and Combs (1996:68) use in order to expose the dominant religious discourses in the Dutch Reformed Church. Examples of such questions are: "Who benefits from this way of thinking? What group of people would definitely be opposed to the dominant discourse and its intention?"

Albert Nolan (1988:197) says that turning to God means conversion. It means turning from sin to salvation. It means to turn from sin as we experience it today in South Africa - the cycle of sin, the hegemonous systems and our active or passive involvement in it. Conversion means turning away from our possible apathy or sins of omission. Repentance or conversion does not mean trying to dissociate ourselves from hegemonous

systems so that we can say we are now all right. Turning to God in our context means committing ourselves to active change (Nolan 1988:197).

In our conversations, we discussed hidden knowledges in Christianity and in the Bible. These knowledges were hidden by the dominant belief system that proclaimed a patriarchal and unjust religion. We searched for narratives in the Bible that we, as White Christians, have forgotten over time.

The group discovered that many White Christians have lost sight of the basic line of love, proclaimed in the Bible. One group member said: "To me, the message of Christ is summarised in the narrative of the Sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7." The Sermon on the Mount emphasises neighbourly love very strongly.

As we looked at the Sermon on the Mount, we could clearly see that Christ is the one who cares for the oppressed and the poor. He is the one who sets the captives free. Some of the group members wondered how we could have missed such an important message in the Bible?

Another group member stated: "I see Christ as the 'suffering Servant'." When I asked the group what the implications of such a view of Christ

could be on a Christian's way of being in the world, they said that Christians were supposed to follow Christ's example. They likewise have to "spend their lives standing up for and propagating justice and love."

We discussed the following argument of Albert Nolan (1988:203):

The problem is not that we Christians have not loved one another. We can even claim to have loved our enemies. The problem is that our love has not been sufficiently active and effective. Protestations of love and concern that do not bear fruit in action are not credible, especially in South Africa.

Nolan (1988:203) argues that love without concerted action is simply an excuse for sins of omission - for apathy, pacifism and cowardice. It has nothing to do with Christianity, because it has nothing to do with the practice of Jesus Christ.

The group agreed that, in future, they would stand up against unjust religious discourses in their churches and in their community - they could no longer keep quiet.

In chapter five, I describe different reflections on our conversations.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The aim of the conversations

In chapter one, I described the purpose of this study. I wanted to explore how narrative conversations could be utilised in a small group of Dutch Reformed congregants in order to confront them with the huge problem of racism and cultural hegemony that still prevail among White Afrikaners.

The conversations had two overall intentions:

1. To reflect on the discourse of racism in our own lives and in the Dutch Reformed Church, and identify the effects that racism and cultural hegemony had on us as White Afrikaans people and on people of Colour.
2. To explore alternative discourses that could introduce us to true generosity and practices of respect and humanity.

I will now describe how the above aims were pursued through our narrative conversations. The only way to reflect on the end result of our conversations was to let the participants reflect on the discussions.

5.2 Participants' reflections on the conversations

Did the participants recognise the discourse of cultural hegemony, and its effects?

At our last meeting I asked the group a few questions to reflect on the above. My questions were: "How did our discussions open your eyes to the discourse of cultural hegemony, and the effects thereof?" "How did the stories about oppression in Krog's book move you?" "In what way did the stories inform you?"

A woman participant answered: "Although I followed the stories of survivors through the TRC and the media, Antjie Krog's book assisted me in getting to understand the depth of the situation of the oppressed." The other group members said that they agreed with this woman, one group member adding: "The narratives of oppressed people in *Country of my skull* made me realise for the first time what the consequences of White

domination truly were.” The youngest group member made the following statement: “I learnt that to listen to, or to read stories of survivors sharpened my sensitivity towards all people, especially towards people of Colour. My experience is that I act in a much more sensitive way towards people now.” Another male group member said: “Our discussions made me realise that I have to listen more carefully to people I do not really know that well.” The group agreed with him, and a female group member said: “I understand now that you cannot turn your back on someone without first listening to what he or she has to say.” This woman’s partner added: “The narratives of the survivors in Krog’s book also made me realise that another consequence of cultural hegemony is that it silences the oppressed and marginalises people, so that no one can hear their stories, and no one can understand them.” A male participant was of the following opinion: “Our discussions made me realise how blind I was not to recognise that I was caught right in the middle of such an evil discourse. I also learnt that race and racism are social constructions, and not something inherent in people. I realised that I cannot say that the Western culture is superior to other cultures.” The group member who started to talk to her Black colleagues for the first time, concluded: “Our discussions and Krog’s book taught me what it really means always to respect people, no matter what their colour is.”

Villa-Vicencio (1996:138) states that it is important for White people to listen to the stories of the survivors. He says that Ellen Kuzwayo once told him:

If you cannot understand my story, you do not accept me as your neighbour. I am an African woman. I've tried to share my soul, my way of seeing things, the way I understand life. I hope you understand.

She continued by stating that Africa is traditionally a story-telling continent, consisting of story-telling cultures, and that we need more stories, irrespective of how painful the exercise might be. This is how we will learn to love one another. Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone else's eyes (Villa-Vicencio 1996:138).

Did the conversations introduce practices of respect, humanity and responsibility to the participants?

In order to reflect on the above, I asked the group members the following questions: "In what way did our conversations facilitate you to take responsibility?" "At what point did you recognise your personal guilt?" "Did our discussions bring about a change in the way you act in your everyday lives?"

The group member in his fifties answered: "Although it was difficult at the start, I recognised the part I played in marginalising and oppressing people of colour. I must add that it took time to understand my own guilt - I think we all went through stages of denial, shame and anger before we could accept our own responsibility." Another participant felt like this: "The discussions made me recognise the fact that I have played right into the hands of a hegemonous, unjust discourse, mainly by keeping quiet." The couple who talked openly about racism in their Bible study group, added: "We realised that although we were passively involved in a system of oppression, we were the people who benefited from Apartheid. At the time when we left school, the system of Apartheid was already facing a quick death. It was easy to say that we had nothing to do with the oppression. But now we realise that we benefited from the Apartheid system - we attended schools where the education was of a high standard, our parents had enough money, we lived in comfortable houses, and we had many opportunities."

The group agreed with the participant who remarked: "I realise that I cannot hide behind my church, my upbringing or my culture anymore. I always thought that I was not guilty as a person, and that it was my church and 'the Afrikaners' who were guilty. I thought that I had nothing to do

with 'them' (the Afrikaners). I realise now that I am guilty as a person, and I have to make up for it in my day-to-day life." All the group members agreed that they could not hide behind collective guilt. An important milestone in the conversations was the fact that each group member recognised his/her personal guilt and responsibility. Personal guilt made each group member ask: "What can I do now?"

When I asked at what point the participants recognised the voice of guilt in their lives, the answers differed. One group member said that he realised he was guilty while reading Krog's book. Three other people argued that they recognised their guilt when we talked about silence. A woman in the group admitted that, as she went through the stages of shame and anger, she realised that it was her own guilt that made her experience those feelings. Other participants felt that they knew they were guilty from the start, but it was only when they started telling their own modest narratives of standing up against silence that they truly realised just how guilty they actually were. One woman stated: "I realised that I could have done much more - but I did not. Then I realised that I could not blame others for my own wrongdoings."

Du Toit (1996:125) argues that we need more than feelings of guilt concerning the injustices of Apartheid to construct a new South Africa. We need a sincere understanding of guilt - that is the responsibility to confess that Apartheid was a sin because it violated the ethical issues of justice, neighbourly love and humanity (1996:125). In retrospect, it is my honest opinion that the group experienced a sincere understanding of this definition of guilt.

When I questioned the group about the change that our conversations brought about in their everyday lives, one participant answered: "I know that I can stand up against silence and injustice. I try to do it at work, at home, and everywhere." Another group member added: "Our conversations taught me how to stand up against silence and injustice. It also taught me not to take a neutral stand when it comes to unjust political, societal and religious structures." Two more participants aired their opinion as follows: "The conversations made us realise that we had to become active participants in the healing of our country." Other participants said they realised that they had to speak out in order to make people aware of their responsibility: "Everyday we look for opportunities where we can make people aware of their responsibility. In speaking out, we hope to set more voices free in our church and community." A female

group member added: "I try to make my colleagues and my family more aware of practices of respect and sensitivity." Another woman said: "My entire attitude towards people in general has changed. I am definitely more sensitive now." The entire group agreed that they were now very sceptical about so-called absolute truths. One group member said: "I know now how absolute truths can blind you to other perspectives. The discussions made my ears more sensitive for alternative viewpoints as those with which I grew up."

The above comments indicate that our conversations indeed opened up practices of respect, humanity and responsibility for the group members. Our discussions did not lead to the launching of huge projects, but that was not the aim of the research. The aim of our discussions was for the group to recognise the oppressive discourse of racism and cultural hegemony which they were a part of, to identify the effects thereof, to take responsibility, and to take steps towards an ethical way of being in their day-to-day lives. I know that wherever the participants will be going, they will stand up against silence and injustice. That was my aim. I wanted to facilitate discussions where Dutch Reformed congregants could be confronted with the pain of injustice, so that they could be mobilised to act differently. This group will now influence people in their

congregation, workplace and family, because they will not keep quiet anymore.

One participant also questioned the impact of our conversations: "The discussions meant a lot to me because I really wanted and needed to talk about this issue. I think it is a good idea for a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church to mobilise a congregation through discussions like this. But what if there are people who do not want to talk about it? You cannot force them to participate in such conversations. Once they get uncomfortable, they will leave!"

I agree with this viewpoint, but I also know that if people who are interested are empowered to speak out in their communities, they will ignite more voices. This can have a positive effect on whole communities or congregations. If more people can stand up to silence and injustice, racism could indeed be renounced in the Dutch Reformed Church!

I am very grateful for the conversations I had with the group. As a White, Afrikaans minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, I was also trapped in a discourse of silence. I never saw myself as a group leader who already knew all the answers. My conversations with the group gave me the

courage to stand up against silence with them. I thank them for their time.

5.3 Personal reflections on the conversations

Conducting the interviews for this project was, in different ways, challenging, terrifying, and joyous. At the start of the conversations, I was scared for a number of reasons: I had to go out and ask personal questions to strangers of whom more than half were much older than me. I was also scared when I had to approach strangers and ask them to participate in the research. They had to give time, share their personal history, and they had to trust me.

The challenge was to conduct conversations about race and racism with a group of educated people who never even thought that they were racist. It was difficult for the group to realise that they also played a huge role in the unjust discourse that prevailed in South Africa, as they thought they were quite liberal. The group members went through stages of shame, shock, guilt and anger before they recognised their own responsibility. Another challenge was to handle the anger, denial, distress and

disappointment that appeared in the conversations as the group actually recognised the part they played in social hegemony and racism.

The joy came from listening to the group's narratives about their private domains of resistance, and of standing up to silence. Once these narratives were told, all the group members, including myself, became excited. The atmosphere during the conversations changed from despair and distress to optimism and being motivated. At one point during the conversations, I felt as if we would never see the light again, and that is the reason why it was exhilarating to see how the conversations turned out in the end.

The research methodology was valuable. Qualitative research made me a part of the group. As researcher I was not superior to the participants. I could learn from them, and they could trust me. The participants realised that they were not the objects of my research, but co-workers.

The narrative conversations were helpful in different ways: Naming the injustice made it easy for the group to recognise the effects of racism; racism was not an abstract concept anymore, but a concrete reality. The externalising conversations made it possible to avoid blaming language, yet

it challenged the participants to take responsibility. Searching for unique outcomes empowered the participants to stand up against injustice and silence.

If I had to repeat the research, I would have liked to have more conversations with the group. More time with the group would have made it possible to launch projects that would encourage the healing process. We read the book of Antjie Krog, but more time would have enabled us to listen to survivors in person, so that they could point out insensitivities that we might have overlooked. Survivors could also have described how they experienced racism at present.

5.4 Conversations with two more groups in the Dutch Reformed Church

The conversations that I had with the group mobilised and motivated me to stand up against silence in my own work. As a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, I no longer keep quiet. I had the opportunity to have conversations about cultural hegemony and racism with two more groups in

the Dutch Reformed Church, and I intend to have such discussions with all the groups with whom I come in contact.

I had conversations with a youth group. My conversations with them had many similarities to the discussions of the group in this project - the conversations had a formal narrative structure, and there was also a time limit for our discussions. The other conversations I had, was at the women's Bible study at our church. These conversations were different in the sense that there was not a time limit (in fact, the conversations are still continuing), and the conversations did not have a formal structure. As we were studying the Bible, we talked about cultural hegemony and racism in an informal way.

5.4.1 Conversations with a youth group

The youth group with whom I had conversations was a group of teenagers aged sixteen and seventeen. This group did not know what Apartheid was like, except from what their parents told them. One girl's father told her that during Apartheid, White people lived in an "unreal" world. The other

group members' parents, on the other hand, told them about all the "advantages" of Apartheid.

The problem that this group faced is not the fact that they were trapped in a culture of silence. This group is used to having people of colour in their schools and in their church. People of Colour are their friends. The violence in the country and the uncertainty of finding jobs in the future weighed much heavier on them than the injustices of Apartheid. They told me that they were scared because they did not see a future for themselves in our country.

A few teenagers in the group told me about their friendships with people of Colour at their schools. However, an example of the struggles they experienced, was a group member who told me that he and a friend tried to reach out to two Black persons of the same age. The group member and his friend played a game of pool at the local arcade with the two Black persons. When the group member and his friend won the match, the two Black persons chased them away with a knife. I realised that this group member now thought that all people of Colour act in this way. He was stereotyping.

In this group, my task as a group leader was to inform the group about our history and about the injustices of the past. As many teenagers are not very keen on reading, I decided to show the group the video *A Dry White Season* - based on the book by André P Brink. This well-known video illustrates what Apartheid and racism did to people.

The video was a starting point for our conversations. In our conversations, the group told me that they were shocked by the video. I could actually see the shock on their faces. For the first time, the group members began to grasp the consequences of cultural hegemony, Apartheid and racism. The group began to understand why people (White and Black) act the way they do in South Africa.

Our conversations helped the teenagers to understand what it means to be sensitive to other people. It also helped them to understand that, although they were insecure about the future, they still had all the privileges that Apartheid bestowed unfairly upon White people.

Finally, the group of teenagers discussed tolerance towards all people in our conversations. Du Toit (1996:126) states that tolerance has to be cultivated and nurtured by all races and classes if we wish to overcome

Apartheid. An intolerant society remains an Apartheid society. This implies tolerance on all levels - religious, sexual, racial and cultural (Du Toit 1996:126).

5.4.2 The women's Bible study group

Another group with whom I had narrative conversations about cultural hegemony and racism, was the women's weekly Bible study group in our church. Most of the women in this group are between the ages of sixty and eighty-five years. The conversations were not formally structured around race and racism, and there was no time limit to the conversations.

In the Bible study group, we have been busy studying the book of Luke for about eight months now. The book does not give instructions about racism in a direct manner. The book of Luke exists of narratives on the life of Jesus Christ. It focuses our attention on Jesus in particular, who came to deliver the marginalised in society. In the Bible study, we discussed many topics that are described in Luke, but if one studies the narratives of Jesus through the eyes of Luke, one will inevitably arrive at discussing unjust practices and liberation theology.

As most of these women were senior citizens who lived with Apartheid for the larger part of their lives, I focused on evil and unjust discourses and religious structures in our conversations. It was hard for the women to realise that what the Church proclaimed about Apartheid in the past was wrong. The question all the women asked was: "What if the Church makes such a mistake again?"

The women were very positive about the new South Africa, and they understood that the violence in our country is a consequence of a lifetime of injustice. They were also opening their eyes to the needs of others, and understood the importance of being sensitive towards other cultures and religions.

This Bible study group was the group who surprised me the most. As the group leader, I realised how I have been stuck in a social discourse of ageism believing that the elderly usually feel threatened by change. Although the women were still disturbed by the violence in South Africa, the women's Bible study group was the group who immediately recognised the structures of social hegemony by which White people live. They immediately recognised the part they played in Apartheid, and they still expend much effort in giving something back to society.

Our conversations about cultural hegemony and dominant discourses in society are still continuing. We are still busy with the book of Luke, and we are now also discussing sexism.

5.5 My role as a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church

Religious organisations, and especially the leaders of such organisations, face a spiritual responsibility to plumb the depths of South Africa's moral ruin (Villa-Vicencio 1996:135). Villa-Vicencio states that a culture that has generated racism, gender discrimination, economic oppression, the horrors of Apartheid and gross human rights violations, stands in need of fundamental renewal. Such a culture contains structures of oppression and habits of moral degradation that, unless confronted and healed, will perpetuate themselves and continue to produce people capable of evil (Villa-Vicencio 1996:135).

In the Dutch Reformed Church, dealing with the past concerns those who benefited from Apartheid. We know that many members of the Dutch Reformed Church still cannot understand that Apartheid was wrong and harmful - not to mention sinful. People would agree that in certain cases

some injustices may have been committed, but it is balanced out by the "benefits" of Apartheid, which allowed, among other things, people to maintain their cultural and group identity (Du Toit 1996:122). An ideology ingrained in the mode of thinking of people takes time to change (Du Toit 1996:122). To help this process as much as possible, information should be released on how survivors experienced the negative face of Apartheid.

In the Dutch Reformed Church, a minister has to do as much as possible in order to inform congregants about the negative face of Apartheid and racism. To face the past means to face the people who you have injured (Du Toit 1996:122). In the Church, I suggest that we discuss our experiences and feelings of hate, anger, guilt, shame and sorrow. In particular we have to speak about the lack of feelings of guilt, shame and sorrow and an unwillingness to repent (Du Toit 1996:122).

Villa-Vicencio (1996:133) states that ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church have the obligation to invite every congregant to discern just how the past has impacted on him/her, to accept his/her responsibility regarding the past and to resolve to do what reasonably needs to be done in the creation of a new future. Narrative conversations (as those

conducted in this study) with the different groups in a congregation can assist the minister to do this.

Cornel du Toit (1996:126) says that ministers have the responsibility to assist congregants in learning to be tolerant towards other cultures and religions. Tolerance is very difficult to achieve when our mind-set is fixed in a fundamentalist manner where final principles, petrified traditions and immovable opinions are upheld (Du Toit 1996:126). Ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church have to realise that religions and theologies are culpable of breeding an intolerant attitude among its members. Intolerance is then regarded as a sign of a loyal, steadfast and unwavering spirit (Du Toit 1996:126). Criticising this attitude does not imply that one can be without principles, attitudes or a mind-set. What is criticised is an exclusive and absolute attitude of not allowing any nuance in the name of a final and last truth (Du Toit 1996:126).

Du Toit (1996:127) names the unique role that churches and religious groups can play in South Africa. A minister in the Dutch Reformed Church can assist congregants in these tasks. I shall name seven of the tasks that Du Toit mentions:

1. The Church's participation in the process of healing is urgent.
2. Congregations need to be challenged to indicate how they intend participating in the process of healing and restoration.
3. A practical Christianity that is socially responsible and alert needs to be propagated.
4. A theology that is socially concerned has to be practised.
5. The logic of domination so long operative in our society needs to be replaced by a logic of freedom, acceptance and equality.
6. Programmes of action need to be submitted as guidelines to congregants.
7. Opportunities need to be allowed for discussing the nature, worth, and theological significance of confession, sacrifice and social involvement.

For a minister to assist a congregation in the above is a daunting task to try to accomplish. One person will not be able to do that, and to preach about the subject will only mobilise a third of the congregation. However, the action of one person will be able to set more voices free. It is important for a minister to act more sensitive, responsible and ethical him/herself. A minister can then start with small groups in the congregation. He/she can have narrative conversations about social

hegemony and racism with all the Bible study groups, youth groups and small groups in the congregation. Such conversations can assist the congregants in standing up against injustice and silence in the Church, and in the community. Narrative conversations in small groups can mobilise congregations to start projects in the community where respect, sensitivity and responsibility can be exercised.

The church council of the congregation where I am employed as a minister decided that the year 2001 will be our sabbatical year. This means that the year 2001 will be the year when our congregation will start with a renewal process. The first term of the year will be devoted to our relationship with God. The sermons, Bible studies and all the church activities will be focused on repentance before God. The idea is that every congregant has to start a new relationship with God. The second term will be devoted to our relationships with other people. The congregants will be motivated to get involved in the healing process of South Africa. Sermons, activities and projects in the congregation will focus on mending broken relationships. The third term of the year will be devoted to our relationship with nature and the environment.

Congregations need to set aside a long period for such projects if they want to succeed, and the projects must not stop when the period ends. These projects must be only the beginning.

As a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, I intend always to be on a journey of discovery, together with the congregants. I want to continue to assist congregants in finding their own truths, instead of being dependant on dominant discourses.

As a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, I want to have sensitive ears in order to find out what it is that paralyse congregants' abilities to stand up against unjust structures in society. Such paralysing concepts may be silence, guilt, shame and fear. As a minister, I have to search for skills to deconstruct paralysing concepts.

Finally, as a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, I have to be able to continuously deconstruct final principles and final "truths" that prevail in society, and especially in our theology. To deconstruct these final principles does not mean that a minister has to disprove the Bible. On the contrary, it means that I have to start reading the Bible more intensively. The Bible is full of narratives where final principles are questioned. The

prophets of the Old Testament, and also Jesus Christ, deconstructed the final "truths" and dominant discourses in society and religion. I want to follow these examples.

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Addendum

Letter of consent

I understand the extent of the project. All my questions have been sufficiently answered. I understand that I am entitled to request further information at any time.

I know that:

1. My participation in this project is completely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw from this project at any time.
3. All personal information supplied by me will be treated confidentially.
4. I shall have input in all the information published.

I am willing to participate in the project.

Signature

Date