

**DECONSTRUCTING "RESILIENCE":  
ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIVING AFTER TRAUMA**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative study illustrates that a narrative approach to pastoral therapy can guide collaborative co-authoring of alternative ways of living after trauma. The research emanates from postmodern epistemology and related discourses of social construction and post-structuralism, as well as a contextual approach to practical theology. The narrative practices of enrolling people in their own knowledges, of creating communities of concern, of honouring people, of celebration and joy, and of co-authoring alternative histories are illustrated through descriptions of how narrative maps guided one-to-one pastoral therapy as well as group work with people who have experienced trauma. The concept "resilience" is deconstructed so as to be understood as those personal actions which do not conform to pathologising predictions of the effects of trauma.

## **Abstrak**

Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie illustreer dat 'n narratiewe benadering tot pastorale terapie die ko-konstruksie van alternatiewe leefwyses na trauma kan fasiliteer. Die navorsing spruit voort uit 'n postmoderne epistemologie en die verwante diskoerse van sosiale konstruksie en post-strukturalisme, asook 'n kontekstuele benadering tot praktiese teologie. Die narratiewe praktyke van ontginning van mense se kennis en vaardighede, van die skepping van gemeenskappe van sorg, van vreugde en waardering, en van die mede-skryf aan alternatiewe stories word geïllustreer. Dit word gedoen deur beskrywings van die wyse waarop narratiewe kaarte individuele sowel as groepsterapie met getraumatiseerde persone kan begelei. Die konsep "weerstandvermoë" ("*resilience*") word gedekonstrueer sodat dit verstaan word as daardie persoonlike ervarings wat patologiese voorspellings oor getraumatiseerde persone weerspreek.

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## Preface

I would like to dedicate this study to Thandi. It was a great privilege for co-research and to write about the small miracles of everyday resistance to in trauma in her life.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to all the other people who contributed to this study:

All the participants, who demonstrated how the therapeutic practices that I value can become reality. In particular I thank Shelley O'Carroll who co-created the "Being Resilient" group.

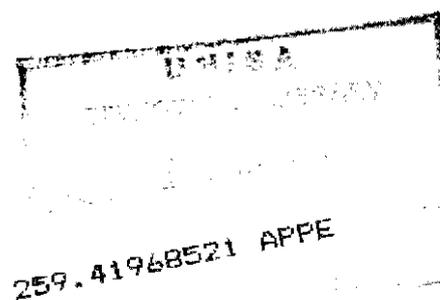
My supervisor, Johann Roux, of whom I appreciate a dedication to narrative practices. He made the use of metaphorical language and creative questioning come to life. I also appreciate the prompt feedback from my joint supervisor, Dr. Hestenes.

Handa Blake, who introduced me to many stories of my own life, including the realisation that I prefer a narrative way of being in the world.

My parents, for their support and patience. Thank you also for showing me how to question the taken-for-granted and to honour the people you meet in life.

Michael, for giving me a base from which to take off and return to.

And our Creator, for life and a choice in how to live it.



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*...I'm going from worse to better. And I'm starting to see my life as something better, as something else. There is another meaning in my life now. You know I've always had dreams, but then I've always been this very pessimistic person, but now I am becoming more optimistic and even though it is quite hard to change, at least I've got some confidence... You know what I told you about knowing what I'm supposed to do, but I'm not doing it. Little by little I'm trying to do what I know I'm supposed to do.*

(Thandi 1999:Interview)

*The way I have coped with the attack and rape and the way I live my life now is actually common sense. We all have the capacity to be 'extraordinary' but we don't have to wait until something traumatic happens to discover this.*

(Thamm 1998:243)

### 1.1 Voices reflecting "resilience" and healing despite traumatic experiences

South Africa is unfortunately a large reservoir of stories that can be told by people who have experienced trauma, be it the trauma of tragic loss, being victim to violence, rape, extreme poverty, abuse, divorce, homelessness, forced removals, torture, and the list could continue. However, I believe our greatest asset also lies in the stories of "resilience" and healing told by many of the victims of traumatic experiences. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (hereafter TRC) statement reflects something of this:

*... voices that for so long had been stilled. And as it listened to stories of horror, of pathos and of tragic proportion, it became aware of the high cost that had been paid by so many for freedom. Commissioners were almost overwhelmed by the capacity for human beings to damage and destroy each other. Yet they listened, too, to stories of great courage, concluding often with an astonishing generosity of spirit, from those who had for so long carried the burden of loss and tragedy. It was often a deeply humbling experience.*

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998:1 = TRC 1998:1)

Part of the aim of this study is to bring out some of these voices reflecting "resilience" and healing despite traumatic experiences. These are the voices of people who are "experts" on alternative ways of living after trauma - ways that do not live up to pathologising predictions. Many such voices can be found in literature. Although my focus will be on the voices of the co-researchers consulted during the course of this research study, which adds richness in its quality of lived experience, a few quotes by other people have been woven into the text. The voice of Alison, as heard at one of her motivational talks and in the book "I have life - Alison's journey" (Thamm 1998) is one such example. It tells the story of the young woman's journey of survival during and after a rape and brutal attack on her life.

*But the wonderful thing is that we are able to cope, if we can only believe it. Somewhere deep inside us, we all have the capacity, even if we have not yet needed to access it. There is ample proof of this in the lives of Holocaust survivors and those people in this country who have been able to forgive torturers and murderers for what they have done. These people and many, many others have been through a living hell that is beyond the normal realm of human experience, and they have survived. Not only have they survived, but changed their lives, liberated themselves and found something of value.*

(Thamm 1998:211)

## 1.2 The meanings attached to stories told about traumatic experiences

Traumatic experiences are often given only negative meaning and are associated with negative feelings. Allison's words bear witness to this:

*At first I thought the only solution to my situation would be to carry on as if the whole trauma had not happened. I wanted to undo the damage by getting on with my life and ignoring it. Because I was so determined to believe this, at first, I missed all the other options that were available to me. I could not see them because I focused too closely on the problem and because I did not look for alternative answers.* (Thamm 1998:247-248)

Whilst not diminishing the trauma experienced, re-engaging with these experiences and the skills and knowledges of hope and "resilience" gained and expressed in surviving them, might alter the meanings attached to them.

*I made a conscious decision to put down the burden of the trauma that had happened to me and all the negative emotions it brought. I vowed that I would make an effort not to carry it with me for the rest of my life. That does not mean I must forget it and pretend it didn't happen. But I have lightened the burden by looking for the meaning and the lessons that are held within it and by not carrying the burden of bitterness, anger and hatred.* (Thamm 1998:250-251)

How narrative practices make it possible for people to deconstruct and take a position on many of the taken-for-granted ways of thinking and being, also in relation to experiences of trauma that are shaping their lives (White 1997:54), will be illustrated in chapters 4 and 5.

## 1.3 Why focus on alternative ways of living after trauma?

Traumatic experiences, often of violence, have been or still are part of so many lives in our country. The TRC therefore recommended that there should be increased research into the consequences of trauma related to the experience of violence and that appropriate models for trauma counselling in the South African context should be developed and implemented (TRC 1998:13).

The Commission recommended that the values, interests, aspirations and rights advanced by those who suffered should be affirmed. Consciousness about the public's moral responsibility to participate in healing the wounded should also be raised. It also became clear that both victims and perpetrators alike need healing (TRC 1998:3). The voice of Father Lapsley, who lost his hands and an eye in a letter bomb attack because he opposed Apartheid, supports this:

*I do not see myself as a victim, but as a survivor of Apartheid...this is part of my triumph of returning to South Africa and living my life as meaningfully and joyfully as possible...I am not captured by hatred, because then they would not only have destroyed my body, but also my soul...Ironically, even without hands and an eye, I am much more free than the person who did this to me...I say to everyone who supported Apartheid, your freedom is waiting for you... but you have to go through the whole process.* (Krog 1998:133)

Other recommendations of the TRC included that the focus of mental health services should be shifted from the almost exclusively one-on-one therapy model, to become more community based. Different care and therapy modalities should be explored and instituted, particularly traditional and indigenous modes of treatment. Community counsellors and family members should be involved in

care provision. Service users must be included in decisions about service provision (TRC 1998:13). With these recommendations in mind, pastoral narrative therapy will be explored as an appropriate model for trauma counselling in the South African context.

By focusing on stories of "resilience" and healing despite trauma this study will seek to achieve a greater understanding not only of the consequences of trauma, but also of how people recover from trauma and choose to live in ways they prefer despite changing circumstances. Rich and thick descriptions of "resilience" and healing could be generated in forums of acknowledgement and shared with others (White 1997:93). These possibilities and how these descriptions could guide conversations with others who experienced trauma will be explored.

#### **1.4 Questions which inspired this study**

A large number of research questions could be formulated at the start of a study such as this. Since qualitative research, which is rather open-ended, is preferred, not all of these questions would necessarily be answered. In fact, other questions might arise and be answered as the study progresses collaboratively. Questions posed at the outset of this study focused on an inquiry as to how a narrative approach to pastoral therapy can guide conversations with people who have survived traumatic experiences.

More specifically the inquiry included questions about how pastoral narrative therapy can contribute and play a role in understanding possible effects of traumatic experiences, as well as understanding "resilience" and healing in the face of trauma. Another question centred on how pastoral narrative therapy can make a contribution to support skills and knowledges of "resilience" and healing. How these knowledges and skills could be shared within a community/group set-up was also speculated about.

Other questions included: How can a pastoral narrative approach be used to re-engage with experiences of trauma in a way that would give voice to stories of hope and "resilience"? How can pastoral narrative therapy contribute to changing the meanings attached to traumatic experiences? How does faith and the faith community influence the way people cope with the challenges posed by traumatic experiences? How do narrative practices facilitate preferred, alternative ways of being in the world despite having experienced trauma?

I have attempted to address these questions through the course of this study and will continue to do so in the future. These questions, as well as an invitation of the TRC (which will be looked at shortly), informed my formulation of the purpose of this study. I believe, however, that the narrative approach which guided this study has contributed to a greater richness which exceeds what I formulated in terms of the purpose and aims, since every participant added her expertise.

## 1.5 A response to an invitation

This study responds to the invitation of the TRC (1998:1):

*...accept our need for healing; reach out to fellow South Africans in a spirit of tolerance and understanding; work actively to build bridges across the divisions of language, faith and history; strive constantly, in the process of transformation, to be sensitive to the needs of those groups which have been particularly disadvantaged in the past, specifically women and children.*

The main purpose of this study is twofold. Firstly the study explores how a pastoral narrative approach can find new ways of increasing understanding about the effects of trauma.

Secondly, by reflecting upon stories told by participants (young women and girls who have experienced trauma), it explores how a pastoral narrative approach and **narrative therapeutic practices** can assist people in living in **alternative, preferred ways**.

The secondary aims of the study firstly include exploring **the influence of faith and the faith community** in attaining the knowledges and skills reflected in stories of "resilience" and healing in the face of trauma, so as to be able to reflect on its significance for the pastoral therapy community, the research community and religious communities of the country.

Secondly, ways in which stories of "resilience" and healing in the face of trauma can be **shared**, and the effect of such sharing will be explored.

## 1.6 Chapter outline

In any study of this nature, an outline of the epistemological, **philosophical** and theological views of the **primary author** is of **paramount importance** to highlight some of the ways in which these will influence what is said and what not. Chapter 2 introduces the reader to these views.

Although this study seeks to privilege the voices of its participants, chapter 3 is an attempt to get an overview of some of the voices in literature reflecting on so-called "resilience" and on approaches to trauma, so as to create a context for comparison and reflection.

Chapter 4 consists of a description of the journey of a young black woman and how pastoral narrative therapy has assisted her in co-constructing alternative ways of living after trauma.

How these alternative ways of living and "being resilient" despite trauma can be shared within a group in a school community and some of the stories which we co-authored following this sharing are explored in chapter 5.

The final chapter, chapter 6, offers reflections on the research process. Recommendations that it could offer practical theology and pastoral therapy are also offered.

## CHAPTER 2: EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 2.1 Introduction

The epistemology or philosophy of the origin, nature and limits of knowledge of the researcher by definition has significant implications on the research procedures and results. Since epistemology is concerned with how people know what they know (Dill & Kotzé 1997:3), it points to the basic assumptions that inform the researcher's way of knowing and her preferred theological position. Deconstruction of the chosen epistemology and theology for this study is thus of paramount importance to gain understanding of how the researcher reached the understandings she did. These include the postmodern discourses of social construction, postmodern theology and post-structuralism. The reader's epistemology, which cannot be deconstructed here and might not correspond, will however also impact on how this study will be read and understood.

This chapter starts with descriptions of postmodern discourse, so as to create a context for the later discussions of postmodern theology and the postmodern discourses of social construction and post-structuralism, both of which inform my preferred contextual approach to practical theology and narrative approach to pastoral therapy.

### 2.2 Postmodern discourse

The term postmodernism has been used to refer to the post-modern age, distinguished as a time period after modernism; the cultural expression of the postmodern age; and postmodern thought and discourse (Kotzé 1994:21). The latter use will be the focus in this study. Since a discourse is not a static theory with objective truth, a fixed definition will not be given. Instead, preference will be given to a variety of descriptions.

Discourse has been described as a *system of statements, practices, and institutional structures that share common values* (Hare-Mustin 1994:19). Kogan and Gale (1997:102) said that *discourse refers to any related system of thoughts or ideas as manifested in language, be it written or oral, and the associated social practices that accompany that system of meaning*. They added that social institutions and individual identity emerged from the play and interplay of discourse. It is thus a social process or *conversational manner that becomes constitutive of our reality* (McLean 1997:14). However, discourse is *not a narrow function of the social structure, but is created, maintained, remanufactured, and reshaped by social interaction at all levels of context* (Kogan & Gale 1997: 103). Accordingly, it holds that meaning is created through language (linguistic and non-linguistic) - but it is not language as such, rather the way in which it is used within discourse that constitutes reality. Dominant discourses can then become so powerful as to constitute and shape self-narrative and personal discourse (Neal 1996:74).

Like Kotzé (1994:21) I gave preference to the use of the term *postmodern discourse* to *postmodernism*, in an attempt to avoid an ideological and exclusivistic concept. Postmodern discourse shares an *anti-objectivist, anti-foundationalist stance with regard to what is knowable* in

the world (Kogan & Gale 1997:102). Postmodern discourse, such as social construction discourse and post-structuralism, are only some of many non-hierarchical interwoven conversations. They are based on the assumption that there are no essences, only discourses. A *both/and* rather than an *either/or* stance is thus preferred (Kotzé 1994:21).

### 2.2.1 A continuation of modernism and its transcendence

*The most obvious thing the term "postmodern" suggests is that it can be distinguished as a period after "modernism", which indicates possible progress in aiming to go beyond modernism and to seek a new way of doing science. In many ways it can also be seen as an opposite approach to that of modernism, in that the split caused between subject and object due to the Cartesian legacy of basic doubt and objectively determined truth is recognised.*

(Herholdt 1998: 216-217)

Postmodern discourse brings the *values, perspectives, hopes, visions, aspirations and personal faith of the person* back into play, since it seeks wholeness and meaning by gaining perspective on the continuity between all levels of a multi-levelled reality (Herholdt 1998:217). Postmodern discourse thus also accommodates the TRC's recommendation that *the values, interests, aspirations and rights advanced by those who suffered be affirmed* (1998:13). For these reasons postmodern epistemological and theological discourses were preferred in this study. I hope that the discussion of a narrative approach to pastoral therapy in this chapter and the closer look at how it can be an appropriate model for trauma counselling in the rest of this study, will illustrate how it fits with these descriptions of postmodern discourse.

The defining characteristic of postmodern discourse, also in terms of theology and therapeutic approaches, is *its endeavour to move away from modernism's fragmentary perspective of reality and its reductionism which attributed to a loss of meaning* (Herholdt 1998:215). Modernism's reductionism, which reduced meaning and function to the way parts of a system work and fit together, is thus replaced by a holistic view that acknowledges that interrelation brings interaction which adds something (Herholdt 1998:222). It is thus a position in which more is more, and not less is more (Blake 1999:17). It highlights *the fluidity and embeddedness of social interaction in the construction of meaning* and views meaning as restraining or organising behaviour (Kogan & Gale 1997:101).

Modernist assumptions that are moved away from include the attempt to objectify knowledge, the belief in absolutes and that matter has universal properties, as well as the notion of fixed reality mirrored by language. These modernist assumptions underlie *the traditional, Western conception of objective, individualistic, ahistoric knowledge* (Gergen 1985:272). It invites a closing down of options and working methodically to identify universally applicable interpretations. Accordingly the assumption was that reality can be known objectively and that a "true" interpretation of this reality can be made. This so-called objectivity emphasises facts, replicable procedures and generally applicable rules, and therefore often ignores the specific, localised meanings of individual people (Freedman & Combs 1996:33). Positivists have thus recently been criticised for excluding too many local, case-based meanings in their generalising theories, while *the theory- and value-laden nature of facts, the interactive nature of inquiry, and the fact that the same set of "facts" can support more*

than one theory, are ignored (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:100).

Due to this criticism the past century of scientific thought has seen a movement away from these modernist approaches to the postmodern discourses of critical theory, constructivism and social construction discourse. Positivist approaches are systematically giving way to approaches which question its subject/object dualism. The ideals of neutral objectivity and empirical observation as set out in its criteria for disciplined inquiry (*internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity*) are also questioned (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:100).

The postmodern approach to research I have chosen will be discussed later in this chapter (section 2.4). As an introduction I would like to contrast it briefly with research from a modernist perspective. The latter is about the elucidation of essences, whereas postmodern research is mainly concerned with elucidating *the processes by which people come to describe, explain and otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live* (Gergen 1985:266). In postmodern discourse the participation of the subject is deemed essential to our understanding of the external world, since the human mind is seen as an integral part of the reality it aspires to know. According to Parry and Doan (1994:10) *our postmodern world is a place without any single claim to truth universally respected, and a growing realisation that no single story sums up the meaning of life*. This is why I have chosen the postmodern, interpretative discourse of social construction, which places an emphasis on the constitutive effect of stories, for this research study. Consequently the voices of the co-researching participants and their accounts of "resilience" despite trauma are of paramount importance in this study.

### 2.2.2 Social construction discourse

Social construction discourse moves the focus from the dualistic tradition of subject and object to treat the process of knowledge. It describes *the hermeneutic circle of interpretation-action* as follows: *beliefs held by individuals construct realities and realities are maintained through social interaction which in turn, confirms the beliefs that are then socially originated* (Fruggeri 1992:43).

The emphasis in social construction discourse is on *social interpretation and the inter-subjective influence of language, family, and culture; on how people interact to construct, modify and maintain what their society holds as true, real, and meaningful* (Freedman & Combs 1996:27). *What can be said about the world - including self and others - is an outgrowth of shared conventions of discourse. There is thus a growing emphasis on the social roots of what we take to be true* (McNamee & Gergen 1992:4). According to Freedman and Combs (1996:22) a postmodern view of reality holds that realities are socially constructed, they are constituted through language and are organised and maintained through narrative. Implicit in this view is that there are no essential truths.

Our social, interpersonal reality is thus constructed through interaction and we live in a world of multiple realities. Hoffman (1990:1) added that reality and meaning is negotiated and constructed through societal *lenses* such as beliefs, values and customs. Knowledge is seen as a result of

social process which develops and circulates amongst people. It is not an objective description of external realities, nor is it a process in our heads. It is something people do together, since it is *context-dependent, socially constructed, and constituted primarily through language* (Kogan & Gale 1997:102).

Social construction discourse has links to constructivism, but should be distinguished from it in terms of the shift of focus from the individual to groups. Constructivism was developed from the biology of perception (Efran & Lukens 1985:23-28), by the Chilean scientists Maturana and Varela (1987:23). They saw the human mind as an integral part of the reality it aspires to know. Von Foerster (1984:288) summarised this view as follows: *the environment as we perceive it is our invention*. Although both discourses hold that the objective perception of external reality is not possible, social construction discourse does not attribute this chiefly to be *determined in each person by his or her individual structure* (Maturana & Varela 1987:22) and the way in which we transform sensory data. Rather it holds that perceptions are formed from social interaction and thus focuses on the inter-subjective influences of language, family and culture. Knowledge is negotiated in a context of language interaction and truth is then relational (Herholdt 1998:219).

The transition of thinking in a modernist way to that of postmodern, social construction discourse also has implications for faith, religion and practical theology. "Resilience" can be viewed as a multi-dimensional combination of things situated within cultural contexts, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender orientation, life stage and religion (Walsh 1996:269). This study will seek partially to explore how people's theology plays a role in "resilience" and how experiences of God assist in attaining skills and knowledges that help facilitate preferred ways of living after trauma. Before this can be done, it would be important to look at the writer's preferred discourses within the theology discourse.

### **2.3 Postmodern theology with a view of reality as social construction**

Adopting a postmodern, social constructionist view of reality also influences the way in which theology is viewed. It accommodates plurality and a variety of views about reality and thus of God. Discussions about God will therefore not be limited to an academic, intellectual perspective, but will allow a broader perspective including the voices of non-academics (Gergen 1991:92). As mentioned before, it invites a rediscovery of the value of human participation, seeking wholeness and meaning by gaining perspective on the continuity among all levels of a multi-levelled reality (Herholdt 1998:218).

Postmodern theology seeks not to focus on dogma that requires exact understanding, but favours a more poetic literary approach where *the sacred can be imagined through the dimension of language, communicating relative and applied meanings to believers respective to their needs and powers to comprehend* (Herholdt 1998:223). It views every aspect of theology as an expression of the whole from a specific perspective, thus asking for more than recognition of relation - it calls for integration. The aim of postmodern theology is *not to provide a rational or exact explanation of God,*

*but to point to coherence between our experience of God and the way we experience the world physically and morally* (Herholdt 1998:224).

With this aim in theology, it follows that making God the object of study in theology could create a dualism, separating God from the cosmos, while making the cosmos the object of natural sciences only. Kotzé (1992:17) joins König in the belief that theology should work with reality *coram Deo*, which implies that a theological study should have a perspective on reality related to its involvement with God or God's involvement with it. Such a definition of theology would allow enough space to avoid its practice being limited by the choice of object, since the object becomes reality *coram Deo*.

Postmodern theology calls for and draws on participation and metaphoric language, which fit with the contextual approach to practical theology and the narrative approach to pastoral therapy that I prefer. Why participation and metaphoric language are important should become clear when these approaches are discussed later in this section. Herholdt's (1998:224-225) ideas also cast light on this. If one believes that one's personal experience and relationship with God should be included in the process of theological reflection, theologising becomes a process of discovering and creating truth at the same time. Believers need not master abstract truth, but *are challenged to make sense of the world by participating in the creation of a new world in terms of which the self can be redefined. Faith is therefore my own experience and theology the story or account of my life.* For this language needs to be used creatively, making constructions of God local and not universal. *Every person imagines God personally and differently, although this does not exclude the religious feeling that my God is also your God* (Herholdt 1998:224-225). From a social construction view this idea should be extended so that every person, also practical theologians and pastoral therapists should remain aware that their view of God is not the only one, and they should therefore maintain dialogue with the rest of the faith community.

The particular use of analogical language to obtain meaning, plays an important part in postmodern theology. *Postmodernism teaches that there is not a fixed body of theological truth available that needs to be communicated from generation to generation. The onus is rather on every generation to discover meaning for themselves by means of metaphoric reference* (Herholdt 1998:224). This view fits with my social construction view of reality. *Metaphors form a bridge between the direct experience of God by faith, or intuitive knowledge, and the intelligibility of that experience* (Herholdt 1998:225). The focus is on patterns and inter-relationships. We cannot focus on God as an abstraction, but *we know God in his relationships, as He discloses Himself within a specific time frame and under peculiar historical conditions* (Herholdt 1998:226). Constant dialogue between discourses as well as deconstruction thereof should thus be part and parcel of postmodern theology.

Postmodern theology serves as an inspiration to let go of the desire for traditional certainty, while seeking increased meaning by deconstructing one's own metaphors and metaphors of other believers about God. It thus encourages one not to cling to doctrinal knowledge, but to seek to

remain in continuous dialogue with others in the faith community. It also allows deconstruction of paradigms and switching them as determined by both the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the time in order to remain relevant. Through continuous dialogue, and through the conversations that constitute this study, I also seek greater understanding of the meaning others have given to their relationships with God and His relationship with them and the world.

I agree with Herholdt (1998:220) that postmodern discourse seems influential enough to suggest changes on all levels of existence (such as the theory of knowledge, the social dimension of language, the value system of society and our understanding of reality, inclusive of our understanding of God). It has moved the focus to the particular rather than the universal, the local rather than the general, and the timely rather than the timeless, which implies that truth is no longer regarded as something with eternal, unchanging, authoritative and objective, absolute status. It becomes clear that truth is relative to the particular social context and presuppositions of the theologian. This emphasis on contextuality and social determination of truth which has an influence on theology fits well with the contextual view of practical theology and the social construction view of reality (Gergen 1991:920) which I prefer.

### 2.3.1 Practical theology

Within theology discourse there is a variety of related discourses such as practical theology discourse and pastoral discourse. In South Africa three approaches to practical theology discourse, **a confessional approach**, **a correlative approach** and **a contextual approach** were identified by Pieterse (1990:249-256). Each approach looks at practical theology discourse from different angles which influence the definition given to it, its aims and its so-called "object" (put in inverted commas because of its positivistic notion of a separation between subject and object which does not fit with a postmodern, social-construction view).

A **confessional approach** to practical theology takes the Bible as its only source and defines it as the study of God's Word in service of the church (Jonker in Wolfaardt 1992:7). Accordingly, the Bible is viewed as the ultimate authority on truth and knowledge. No questions are asked about how we come to gain knowledge, since theology is seen as an elevated science. The "object" of practical theology is then church practices and the aim is to get the practices and service aspects in line with the Bible. The Bible is thus seen as a "textbook" from which doctrines regarding church practices can be formulated.

A critical look at a confessional approach reveals the danger that the official church with its so-called theological tools will have the final say as to how the Bible should be interpreted and how other sciences and ideas in the community should be valued (Wolfaardt 1992:18). It has only one perspective on truth and does not go into conversation with other discourses. Little cognisance is taken of the influence of experience, the context and of how we come to understand the Word. The danger of becoming church-politically correct, by insisting that one interpretation of the Bible is the only "true" interpretation, seems quite big with a confessional approach (Wolfaardt 1992:42).

Postmodern theologians, in contrast, do not use the Bible as a "textbook" which reveals truth as a static set of prescriptions. Gerkin's (1986:48) view of the Bible would be preferred: *The biblical story of God is an open-ended story. It does not stop with the end of the collection of biblical texts. Rather it concerns the activity of God in all of history, a story that continues in the present and is to be fulfilled in the future.* From social construction point of view, theologising is an inter-subjective, co-constructing process. The Bible is thus seen as one of many players (which may be given a senior position by the faith community) in the process. The Bible's normative value thus lies in the fact that the faith community makes it a norm. The Bible is then a text that becomes the Word of God through conviction and a...process of interpretation and re-interpretation (Roux 1996:48). Knowledge, also of God, cannot be value free and dogmas are thus not revealed truth, since divine revelation necessitates interpretation and is thus open to subjective input. Postmodern theologians therefore realise the need to express themselves in the idiom of the day, within a specific religious persuasion and socio-economic climate (Herholdt 1998:221). These concerns are accommodated in the contextual approach to practical theology that I prefer. A discussion of this approach follows shortly.

A **correlative approach** looks at how the Bible is enriched by the insights of secondary sciences. Firet was an early proponent of this approach and defined Practical Theology as the theological theory about the *Christian-communicative action-systems in service of the gospel*; those systems which serve the coming of God through His Word to people in the world (Wolfaardt 1992:9). According to Tillich (quoted in Wolfaardt 1992:9) *the method of correlation explains the content of the Christian faith through the existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence.* The aim of practical theology is then to bring *the correlative interdependence between faith / the Bible / theology and existence / situation / reality* to the fore. The object then is not a book, but actions that aim to communicate the gospel. Although the Bible is respected as source, space is left for enrichment through experiences of faith and secular sciences (Wolfaardt 1992:10).

Wolfaardt (1992:23) and Van Wyk (1995:87) point out that Habermass has taken this further to include not only actions, but *ideal communication* too. According to Van Wyk (1995:86-88) this approach could be called **communicative theological operational science**, and (together with Bastian's empirical-analytical approach and Otto's approach which is closely linked to critical theory) it implies approaching practical theology as a theological operational science. It should suffice here just to mention that space was created for the social environment. From a social-construction viewpoint this approach can be criticised for not looking at the meaning given to faith, constituted in a certain context, before looking at faith actions. The question also arises as to who decides which actions can be considered to be *in the service of the gospel* (Wolfaardt 1992:23). Firet's (1987:260) emphasis on questioning the taken-for-granted have to be kept in mind. He thus proposes a broader reading of the Bible, which has to take the situation in which it is read into consideration. A social-construction view would go further to include not only the situation but the inter-subjective,

co-constructing process of theologising taking place within a faith community. These considerations can be addressed in a contextual approach, which will be discussed shortly.

If the Bible becomes the sole object of theology, other ways of obtaining knowledge about God are cut off (Kotzé 1992:16). A more inclusive model which seeks to provide meaning in terms of how the world is experienced in relation to the Christian belief in a benevolent God, is needed. Although a correlative approach holds that theology should be based not only on the dominant metaphors of faith (especially those derived from the Bible), but also on scientific insights into the complexity of material reality, it does not focus on factors like human experience and meaning (Herholdt 1998:218). Practical theological discourse which looks at reality *coram Deo*, implies that definitions of practical theology as *the study of acts of faith of people* (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:13) and of *communicative acts in service of the gospel* (Fiet 1987:260) should be broadened. It should include looking at the faith constructions and dialogical meaning-giving within the given contexts (Roux 1996:81). The postmodern theological position of both/and makes it possible to have both the Bible and other metaphorical voices *coram Deo* as role-players in theological discourse (Roux 1996:49).

Within the postmodern discourses of social construction and post-structuralism (which will be looked at in more detail shortly) the self is no longer viewed as *core, essential, and stable from context to context*; rather *selves emerge from discourse* (Kogan & Gale 1997: 103). If the self actively incorporates, reproduces, and evolves in the contexts in which it participates, individual experience cannot be separated from the contexts and conversations that give it meaning. The emphasis on context in my epistemological and theological positions, contributed to my choice of a **contextual approach** to practical theology.

Poling and Miller (1985:62) propagate a contextual approach which I agree with:

*Practical Theology is critical and constructive reflection within a living community about human experience and interaction, involving a correlation of the Christian story and other perspectives, leading to an interpretation of meaning and value, and resulting in everyday guidelines and skills for formulation of persons and communities.*

This kind of *critical and constructive reflection* will also partially be the approach to and aim of this study. Gerkin (1986:22) added that *it finds its task and purpose in the practical reality of situations that call for pastoral response. It is always a theology that emerges from reflection on a practical situation*. Practical theology from a contextual approach has also been described as the disciplined, reflective theological activity which seeks to relate faith of the Christian community to its life, mission and social praxis. It is differentiated from a correlative approach in that its focus is working towards social transformation (Wolfaardt 1992:12). These descriptions of practical theology fit with a social construction focus on context, since it implies that a multiplicity of realities exist. They may differ from situation to situation and have to be reflected on. A narrative approach to pastoral therapy, which will be discussed shortly and illustrated later, makes this possible.

According to Wolfaardt (1992:12-13) a characteristic of a contextual approach is that the context plays a dominant role, which makes intimate knowledge of the situation within which practical theology is practised a prerequisite. The focus here is even more on the world (or community) rather than on the church. This gave me the freedom to conduct the group work which forms part of this study within a school community and not a church. The role of the Bible and traditions can be selective or fundamental, depending on how it assists transformation. Unlike the individualist nature of other approaches, the concerns of the (faith) community are of great importance when practising practical theology. It is a more inclusive approach in that it speaks about the Christian story rather than the Bible exclusively. I hope to demonstrate how well these characteristics fit with a narrative approach to pastoral therapy in this study.

A contextual approach seeks to leave behind the positivist pretence that theology is a pure version of the Word. It fits rather with a reflexive, social-construction way of theologising which is conscious of the fact that it is a human activity, which is socially constructed by people belonging to a particular nation, group, race and church (Wolfaardt 1992:42). Gerkin (1986:37) reiterates that *theological reflection, wherever and whenever it occurs, always begins within an immediate social context*. It cannot begin from a *ahistorical point of departure*. I thus choose a contextual approach as my preferred approach or discourse within the practical theology discourse. Hopefully this approach to practical theology will help maintain a pastoral therapeutic environment which can cultivate some of the ideals set by Pieterse (1996). In the light of social construction discourse as epistemology and the postmodern approach to theology I prefer, I agree with Pieterse (1996:60-61) that practical theology and pastoral therapy should strive to create *a plurality and non-essentialist understanding of subjectivity*; it should provide *tools to deconstruct and expose the inherent oppressive nature of dominant discourses in society, which serve to entrench existing relations of inequality*; it should have *a quiet confidence to embrace ambiguity, difference, contradictions, open-ended futures and uncertainty reflexivity*; it should create opportunities for *subjecting one's practice to scrutiny and critique*; and it should allow us to be *more susceptible to being playful, along with being committed to serious action*. Why these ideas are especially relevant in a narrative approach to pastoral therapy will be illustrated in the sections which follow.

### 2.3.2 Pastoral therapy

One of the questions that arises in a discussion about pastoral therapy is how it differs from other social sciences and helping professions. Heitink's (1998:13) view is as follows: *De eigen identiteit van het pastoraat is geworteld in de verbondenheid met de christelijke traditie en met de kerk, de gemeenschap van gelovigen*. How one views pastoral care and pastoral therapy is also dependent on one's theology. Within the theological position I have chosen, pastoral care can be described as meaningful help given by a believer to others in need, so that meaningful life processes can be improved. For me, the pastoral nature of therapy thus lies in the therapist's relationship with God and in her openness to ask questions about her own and the client's experiences and conceptions of God. Since I view pastoral therapy as a collaborative process, the client will co-determine if religious experiences and spirituality mentioned by Heitink (1998:19) (*een dieptedimensie die te*

*maken heeft met religieuze ervaring en spiritualiteit*) distinguishes pastoral therapy from psychotherapy. The social construction of the therapist's faith also determines how this influences the way she approaches therapy. If she is a Christian, for example, her dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the therapeutic process could add a spiritual dimension. If God's love for all people and the view that therapy is also a process which occurs *coram Deo*, is taken into consideration, it follows that pastoral therapy can also occur between a pastoral therapist and a non-believer (Blake 1999:39).

According to Louw (1989:4) pastoral care serves to convey God's care as set out in the Gospel in practically orientated ways so as to invite people to grow in faith. Contact with other disciplines serves as a reminder that although pastoral care includes an invisible dimension of faith, the focus is on a total person, living in the world (Louw 1989:5). Differences found between approaches to pastoral therapy can be greatly attributed to differences in the way humans are viewed. It could be informative to have a brief look at how other approaches to pastoral therapy, a **kerugmatic approach**, an **eductive-transformation approach** and a **relational approach**, differ from my preferred **narrative approach**.

A **kerugmatic approach**, which is informed by the reformed view of humans, places the uniqueness of pastoral care with its aspect of proclamation. Thurneysen's thoughts have been linked to those of Barth's theology, which focuses on salvation through the grace of God. He thus does not see pastoral care as separate from preaching and proclaiming God's word, but as part and parcel thereof. De Jongh van Arkel (1992:125-26) points out that other voices, notably that of Muller have been added to Thurneysen's. Muller pointed out a danger in preaching pastoral care and felt that pastoral care is a special form of meeting between God and humans. He saw giving help regarding faith and life rather than proclaiming as being at the centre of pastoral care. I agree with Muller, rather than Thurneysen, but as mentioned earlier would broaden pastoral care to include a believing pastoral therapist working with believers and non-believers.

The **eductive-transformation approach** was influenced by the democratic ideals of America with its focus on the autonomy of people. Hiltner is an important American pastoral theologian who drew a distinction between pastoral counselling (therapy) and pre-counselling (pastoral care) (de Jongh van Arkel 1992:127). He also emphasises the attitude of empathy expounded by Rogers, amongst fears from others that communication techniques in pastoral therapy were given precedence over the *sheppardly function* of pastoral care (Louw 1989:6). The focus in relation to redemption has thus shifted from Christ taking over the guilt of our sin to focus more on the potential for self-actualisation which is released by it. Schleiermacher's view that the starting point of pastoral help is the independence of the autonomous person contributed to this stance (Louw 1989:6-7). Heitink's bipolar model holds that pastoral therapy contains both a therapeutic moment and an evangelical moment (Louw 1989:27). His and J. Rebel's ideas added a dimension which made the potential of an eductive approach more transformative, in that it recognises the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. An eductive approach became an eductive-transformation approach (Louw 1989:14-15). Pastoral therapy is then not psychotherapy, but salvation-therapy (*heilsterapie*) in which God's

Spirit changes people continuously (Louw 1989:19).

I agree that pastoral therapy can include both help with life issues and with faith issues, but do not agree that self-actualisation should be the aim. I prefer a view of humans as people with a God-given life in which choices can be made once the discourses informing them have been deconstructed. Rather than placing self-actualisation as a goal, pastoral therapy should seek to ask questions and reflect on people's preferred, alternative ways of being in the world as expressed in their lived experience. These preferred ways might become more and more part of their lives. If the person is a believer, this could be experienced through the transforming power of God's Spirit.

A **relational approach** avoids seeking exclusively Biblical foundations for pastoral therapy in a deductive way. Scripture is used in an inductive way as source of functional pastoral actions already taking place (de Jongh van Arkel 1992:132). The relational dimension of pastoral therapy includes not only relations between people, but also how those relations are carried by God's Spirit. Oates (1974:11) calls this the *God-in-relation-to-persons consciousness in counselling*. Pastoral therapy is then seen as current happenings which realise God's care. God is thus not projected outside the pastoral situation, but is incarnated within the process, in that the Word becomes flesh through it (de Jongh van Arkel 1992:133). I agree with these aspects of a relational approach, but want to qualify them in what can be called a narrative pastoral approach.

I choose a **narrative pastoral approach**, since it allows me to work with people from all walks of life and religions, while creating the space for those seeking help to choose to make God's transformative power in their lives more visible and to be guided by His Word if so desired. The anthropology that distinguishes this approach from others will be highlighted in the sections that follow. One aspect that I would like to point out here is that it allows the clients to be the experts of their lives and to co-determine the content of therapeutic conversations. A basic assumption is that people's problem-dominated stories are not the only possible stories of their lives. The therapist thus asks questions about events that do not fit with this dominant plot (so called "unique outcomes") so as to help the client co-author alternative stories about their lives and identities (White 1997:3). By externalising problems, the clients will also be asked to state the position they want to take towards those actions and stories. The influence of God's voice and of the clients' relationship with God on both the problem (such as traumatic experiences), and on living according to an alternative story (stories that reflect "resilience"), can also be explored.

Chapter 4 and 5 will provide more detailed descriptions of the process of co-constructing alternative ways of being in the world. Although these chapters cast light on how the approach fits with my theological and epistemological positions, this chapter will continue with a brief summary of the exponents of narrative therapy and an indication of the anthropology of a narrative approach to pastoral therapy. I will also attempt to show how the approach aims to move beyond cybernetics and how it can be linked to the postmodern discourse of post-structuralism.

### 2.3.3 A brief summary of discourses that constitute a narrative approach to therapy

The narrative approach to pastoral therapy is related to Gerkin's (1986:26) idea that all things human are in some sense rooted in a narrative or story of some kind. Okri (1996:25) says: *Without stories we would go mad. Life would lose its moorings or lose its orientations. Even in silence we are living our stories.* Gerkin (1986:29) also quotes Hardy (quoted in Wicker 1975:47):

*For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.*

White and Epston (1990) are two of the most prominent exponents of narrative therapy. The narrative approach to pastoral therapy that I prefer and which is illustrated and elaborated on in chapters 4 and 5, is based largely on their ideas (Epston 1998; White 1997). Freedman, Epston and Lobovits (1997:xv) give an outline as to why they prefer a so-called "narrative" therapy:

*The term narrative implies listening to and telling or retelling stories about people and the problems in their lives...It is hard to believe that stories can shape new realities. But they do...Language can shape events into narratives of hope. We humans have evolved as a species to use mental narratives to organise, predict, and understand the complexities of our lived experience. Our choices are shaped largely by the meanings we attribute to events and to the options we are considering.*

Parry and Doan (1994:24) elaborate about what *the narrative dimension emphasises*. How this shift in emphasis can be linked to a movement beyond cybernetics will be looked at now.

### 2.3.4 A movement beyond cybernetics to a narrative approach

*There has thus been a movement beyond first order cybernetics which taught us that we can never escape from the limitations of our own perspective, and second-order cybernetics which made it clear that we could never even escape the influence of the perspectives and actions of whatever system we attempt to observe. The narrative dimension emphasises that whether the viewer is a person, a family, a community, or a people, the world is unavoidably viewed through the lens of a succession of stories - not only a personal story, but gender, community, class, and cultural stories.* (Parry & Doan 1994:24)

Structuralist views looked for structure behind story so as to measure against a norm. This in turn contributed to a pathologising and an invalidating tendency. Since an expert was needed to translate experience into a more abstract level, it could not be recorded in one's own voice. These practices are related to the French intellectual Foucault's "technologies of knowledge-as-power". White (1997:220) describes Foucault as a post-structuralist. Foucault looked at how society categorises and marginalises certain sectors with labels of normal and abnormal, by focusing on the relation between power and knowledge (White 1997:232). According to Foucault *the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge, and conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power* (Foucault 1980:52). Accordingly knowledge is power; knowledge and power operate mainly through language; language becomes a power tool used by those in power; and dominant discourses marginalise others in that they assume the status of "truth". White (1997:220) quotes Foucault when he speaks about the importance of the question "*What are we today?*" which encourages *historical reflection on ourselves*. A look at the history of what we are today and what

we are moving beyond, also in terms of the way therapy is viewed, thus becomes significant.

### 2.3.5 A post-structuralist, narrative perspective

White (1997:223) believes that the post-structuralist questions *about "what we are today" inform an inquiry into how lives are constituted through knowledges and practices of culture - into how it is that the knowledges and practices of culture inform our modes of life and thought.* This kind of inquiry renders visible the effects of discourse in the constitution of life, which in turn contributes to the realisation of alternatives that pastoral narrative therapy strives for. In contrast to structuralist approaches to therapy which may have self-actualisation of the "essential self" as its aim, a post-structuralist approach deconstructs structuralist systems of interpretation and understanding. According to White (1997:225) these include *the will to truth; the repressive hypothesis* (which states that we should look for what blocks our expression of our *true human nature/real selves*); and *the emancipation narrative*. He proposes that through post-structuralist inquiry we *break from the mission to discover something "given" about nature* (White 1997:223). A post-structuralist position holds that *selves emerge from discourse* and individual experience cannot be separated from the contexts and conversations that give it meaning (Kogan & Gale 1997: 103).

From a postmodern, post-structuralist position therapy is not viewed as hierarchical, strategic intervention; instead it is seen as a collaborative and participatory process in which a preferred self-narrative is continually socially constructed through language and maintained in narrative (Kogan & Gale 1997:101). Language is thus used to continually create the nature and meaning we know; not to mirror nature. The focus is on how the language we use constitute our world and beliefs (Freedman & Combs 1996:28). By using new language to speak about what happens during pastoral narrative therapy, new possibilities are co-authored.

The impact of deconstruction ideas on therapy has led to approaches like the narrative approach, which sees a story as incomplete and fragmented, with more left out than included, depending on assumptions and beliefs of the narrator. Parry (1991:43) thus reflects that *a story is not a life, only a selection of events influenced by that person's beliefs about herself and others.* Conversations and the co-constructing process thus deconstructs what was said about experiences to reveal some of the left out and "not yet said" (De Shazer 1993:115). As Kotzé (1994:40) points out, to listen for what was not said does *not refer to the unconscious or repressed in a psychodynamic sense, but to the opposite meaning within what was said, to validate and to question what was said and what was not said.*

As mentioned earlier, how these epistemological ideas relate to a narrative approach to pastoral therapy will be illustrated in Chapters 4 and 5. As a pointer it could be helpful just to point out that the anthropology of a narrative approach to pastoral therapy implies that people have stories (or unique outcomes) of resistance to the dominant discourses that problems such as trauma paints of themselves and their options. By asking questions about lived experience that has been left unsaid, sparkling moments can be elaborated on, also in terms of what these moments say about

the person's identity. Such re-authoring conversations bear testimony of "resilience" despite trauma.

## 2.4 A postmodern research approach

In accordance with this study's postmodern focus on lived experience, qualitative research, which has lived experience at its centre, will be done. The approach will be narrative and also interpretative, in that it will examine how local culture and *local knowledges can counteract the hegemonic tendencies of objectified knowledge* (Collins in Denzin & Lincoln 1994:102). This implies that the study will have an action research perspective which is geared toward change and movement and it will aim to be participatory and freeing (Heshusius 1994:15). These implications are in line with the contextual approach to practical theology that I prefer and my postmodern epistemological and theological positions.

The participation of the co-researching participants constitute the main focus of this study. How people manage to live in alternative, preferred ways despite trauma and the freeing aspect involved in these alternatives are explored. Chapters 4 and 5 thus explore how unique outcomes that are found in the lives of clients can be seen as "resilience" in the face of trauma. The values outlined in Stanfield's new ethnic paradigm, which is said to be *holistic, relational, qualitative, and sensitive to gender, kinship, spirituality, and the oral communicative traditions* (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:103) are aimed at in the process of co-research. These values also gain significance when read in the context of the TRC's recommendations that the values, interests, aspirations and rights advanced by those who suffered should be affirmed (see section 1.3). Qualitative research holds great potential for exploring belief systems and narrative processes that influence coping and adaptation. Narrative accounts of traumatic experiences and the meanings given to them can also be particularly useful for understanding continuity and change in people who face diverse challenges (Walsh 1996:274).

### 2.4.1 Research procedures

Chapter 3 focuses on ideas that have been voiced in literature about the concepts of "resilience" and trauma. A look at literature would presumably enable the researcher to ask relevant and diverse questions. It will also create a context within which the researcher's preferred approach to "resilience" and trauma within a therapeutic context can be set – either as an enlargement or in contrast. In a process of continuous meaning construction, this study will collect a few descriptions through conversations involving storytelling and reflecting on questions, themes and metaphors related to the area of research. These conversations are described in the case study in chapter 4 and the group work in chapter 5. Although these conversations were unavoidably guided or confined by preconceived ideas entertained by the researcher, she aimed to explore beyond these boundaries. Researcher and participants were therefore co-explorers of ideas found to be relevant for the participants. These research procedures would fit with Patton's (1990:7) view:

*There is no burden of proof. There is only the world to experience and understand. Shed the burden of proof to lighten the load for the journey of experience.* (Patton 1990:7)

#### 2.4.2 Meaning given to research and ethical considerations

In accordance with qualitative research and a narrative approach, storytelling will not only be the research procedure, but also the method of reporting and "analysing" the data. No formal quantitative data analysis or statistical analysis could be useful. *Trustworthiness and authenticity* then replace positivist criteria, since the study is oriented towards the production of reconstructed understandings and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:100).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:114) propose that *the trustworthiness* criteria involve *credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity), dependability (paralleling reliability) and confirmability (paralleling objectivity)*. The *authenticity* criteria are said to be of *fairness, ontological authenticity (enlarges personal constructions), educative authenticity (leads to improved understanding of constructions of others) catalytic authenticity (stimulates action) and tactical authenticity (empowers action)*. Criteria for evaluation will be based on ethics of caring, personal responsibility, and open dialogue. These criteria come from an understanding that there is *no dividing line between empirical research activity and the process of theorising or interpretation* (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:102). Ethical considerations made it important to allow participants to edit the study and to add anything they deemed important.

#### 2.5 Conclusion and implications for views on trauma and "resilience"

To understand and encourage "resilience" within a social construction discourse framework, we must attend to the interplay between what occurs within families and what occurs in the political, economic, social, and racial climates in which individuals live. Ideas about adaptation are also influenced by the meaning given to experience, which is socially constructed and thus also transmitted through the perceptions and understandings of those around us (Walsh 1996:266). The central role of narrative in organising, maintaining, and circulating knowledge of ourselves and our worlds is emphasised in this study. Walsh (1996:267) joins Cohler in emphasising the importance of narrative coherence in making sense of disruptive experiences. *Crisis and challenge become a tension and organising principle for a coherent life story* (Cohler in Walsh 1996:267). Traumatic experiences generate a crisis of meaning and potential disruption of personal integration, which in turn prompts the construction or reorganisation of one's life story. In pastoral narrative therapy stories of adversity and "resilience" are co-constructed collaboratively to seek and maintain a sense of coherence and integrity.

Walsh (1996:269) agrees with Faliccov that our view of "resilience" should be a *multi-dimensional ecological one*, recognising that people combine and overlap features of multiple cultural contexts, based on a unique configuration of many variables in their lives, such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, life stage and religion. These ideas need to be deconstructed, and the following chapters will be an attempt to contribute to richer descriptions of "resilience" and how people manage to live in ways they prefer in the face of trauma.

## CHAPTER 3: DISCOURSES INFORMING CONCEPTIONS OF TRAUMA AND "RESILIENCE"

*The resiliency concept exudes hope and hopefulness. The stories that accompany the resilient child, family or community are not those that appear on the nightly news. Resiliency narratives warm our hearts, fight cynicism, and remind many of us why we got into the field in the first place. The challenge for resiliency lies not only in conceptual rigor, empirical connectedness, and practical utility, but also in understanding its connection to the critical context of political ideas. To say something has political overtones or dimensions is not to demean it, to make it lose its magical quality, or align it with a cynical world. It is simply to remind us that if we really want to consider something contextually, then the ideological and political aspects of it must be included.* (Liddle 1994:174)

### 3.1 Chapter overview

From my epistemological and theological positions as set out in chapter 2 it follows that realities are socially constructed, constituted through language, and organised and maintained through narrative (Freedman & Combs 1996:22). These positions clearly have implications for the conception of "resilience" and the kinds of conversations with people who have had traumatic experiences that I will privilege. Since I choose to adopt a postmodern view of the world, which is said to be a *place without any single claim to truth universally respected, and a growing realisation that no single story sums up the meaning of life* (Parry & Doan 1994:10), I will not seek to formulate a fixed definition of "resilience", but will try to deconstruct the concept and to illustrate why I prefer the descriptions I do.

As mentioned in chapter 1 this study aims to be participatory and to privilege the voices of participants and their stories of "resilience". However, a brief look at some of what has been said about the concept "resilience" in literature will place these voices within a context of other discourses. It is hoped that this chapter will help the researcher to ask more diverse questions, so as to get a richer description of the concept and to address its contextual, ideological and political aspects referred to by Liddle (1994:174) in the quote above. It is also hoped that this process might add new, richer, thicker or different meanings to the concept .

As an introduction to the therapy process that will be described in chapter 4, this chapter will also look briefly at a few of the discourses in literature around approaches to trauma. In an attempt to show how taken-for-granted notions of issues related to trauma can be questioned, some of the thoughts and questions that inform a narrative pastoral approach to trauma will receive closer attention. Finally, I will look at how a narrative pastoral approach to therapy influences the way trauma is looked at and how it aims to help people co-author alternative ways of living after trauma.

### 3.2 Deconstructing "resilience": related literature

In order to re-engage meaningfully with stories reflecting skills and knowledges (used in plural form in "narrative language") of hope and resilience, the concept "resilience" first has to be deconstructed. Accordingly, it has been put in quotation marks in the title so as to serve as a reminder that resiliency represents more than a single concept or idea. Clarity is needed as to which of the conceptualisations related to it will be favoured in this study, and which will be differed from. The first preference I would like to state is related to the roots of different conceptions of resilience and how these relate to a narrative approach to therapy. A quote by Michael White

(1995:94) highlights a narrative perspective focus on unique outcomes that can be seen as expressions of resilience and is indicative of the conceptualisation that I prefer:

*We can work together to identify unique outcomes - those personal actions that cannot be read as self-rejections, but as self-care. These unique outcomes provide a point of entry to the counterplots of women's lives, those accounts that have to do with survival, resilience, protest, resistance, and so on.*  
(White 1995:94)

Narrative pastoral therapy, like the solution-focused model, assumes that clients have resources (skills and knowledges) that will allow them to resolve their difficulties. The above quote by Michael White illustrates this emphasis on resilience and strengths, which decry the damage model that underlies many traditional approaches to therapy, such as a psychoanalytic approach. It argues for a less pathological approach to therapy (Hawley & De Haan 1996:283) and will thus not be guided by *structured clinical interview techniques* of Weiss (1993:181-184) which aim to diagnose clients as suffering from a traumatic stress syndrome. Rather, a narrative approach seeks to help clients discover the lived experience that provide preferred alternatives to their dominant, problem-saturated stories, and thus discover positive meanings to distress (White & Epston 1990). That the unique contexts of this lived experience need to be explored, fits with my contextual approach to practical theology.

I thus prefer the conceptual orientations of the *family resilience* concept which tends to emphasise wellness and adaptability, to that of *individual resilience, which is grounded in a pathological oriented framework which is concerned with the long-term development of resilience* despite predictions of pathology *and the discovery of risk and protective factors* (Hawley & De Haan 1996:295). A look at both these conceptions will be included here so as to deconstruct the preferred meaning.

### 3.2.1 Different conceptions of "resilience"

The concept of family "resilience" is bound together by several threads: "resilience" is seen as surfacing in the face of hardship; it carries the property of buoyancy - the ability to bounce back; and it tends to be viewed in terms of wellness rather than pathology (Hawley & De Haan 1996:284-285). Various other descriptions of "resilience" related to this can be found in recent literature: it has been viewed as the capacity for positive outcomes despite challenge or threatening circumstances (Egeland et al 1993:524) and as recovery in the face of trauma such as abuse (Smith & Carlson 1997:236). It is used to describe people who have the ability to withstand and rebound from crisis and trauma (Walsh 1996:261). They lead fulfilling lives despite having been subjected to trauma or being "at high risk" for developing personal or social problems due to their childhood experiences. Wang and Gorden (1994:3) said that "resilience" refers to successful adaptation or coping despite risk and adversity; the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, even if they are disruptive and discouraging. Unlike the concept of being *invulnerable*, it does not suggest that one is incapable of being wounded, but is associated with flexibility, suggested in descriptions such as *to rebound, spring back* and *the power of recovery* (Garmezy 1993:129).

As mentioned before research related to individual "resilience" focuses on the presence of protective factors or processes that moderate the relationship between stress and risk, and coping and competence. However, factors defining risk samples and definitions of adaptation and competence vary widely across studies (Egeland et al 1993:517). *Hardiness*, described as having a *sense of control over one's life*, having commitment in terms of the *meaning ascribed to one's existence* and having an *openness to viewing change as challenge* (King et al 1998:421), has been described as an individual protective factor. Hardy people are also said to be more likely to take advantage of sustenance and assistance available in the social environment. "resilience" has then also been viewed increasingly in terms of a transactional process, where the focus is on the interaction of genetic, biological, psychological, and sociological factors, which may serve as vulnerability, protective or risk variables (Egeland et al 1993:517). Protective factors could be extended to include not only individual factors, but also environmental factors (like supportive people in the community or at school) and family factors (Smith & Carlson 1997:236). The family can then also serve as a protective factor or a risk factor. Family factors that have been said to promote "resilience" include maintenance of family rituals; confrontation of problems; the absence of divorce during adolescence (Hawley & De Haan 1996:285); respect for diverse perspectives and individual differences; an overall mood of warmth and caring; and having clear yet flexible structures (Sayger 1996:81).

### 3.2.2 Alternative meanings and stories of "resilience"

In the light of my epistemological position I would like to move away from *modernism's fragmentary perspective of reality and its reductionism which attributes to a loss of meaning* (Herholdt 1998:215). This study's qualitative look at the stories of "resilience" in the lives of a few people and at how narrative therapy can contribute to embroider on these, rather than identifying general protective or risk factors as such, testifies to this. It also underscores why a phenomenological or meaning level should not be omitted, since similar experiences can be seen as either disabling or enhancing (Liddle 1994:169). According to Smith and Carlson (1997:233) the critical factor appears to be the individual's evaluation of an event or situation in terms of its implications of well-being. They also note that adults' perception of what is stressful differs in significant ways from those of children and adolescents. A narrative pastoral approach is thus proposed as a suitable model for trauma counselling: since it allows people to re-engage with stories or discourses that are constitutive of their lives, they co-author alternative meanings to their experiences of trauma, related to the "resilience" shown in the "sparkling moments" of resistance to the effects of trauma.

The meaning level is related to another perspective on "resilience" - that it can be viewed as forged through adversity, not despite it. In this view the paradox of "resilience" is that some of our worst times can also be our best (Wolin & Wolin 1993 in Walsh 1996:271). Families report that traumatic experiences sometimes make their relationships with each other more precious and loving than they might otherwise have been. This kind of "resilience" does not imply bouncing back as if untouched, but involves a *process of integrating the fullness of the experience into the fabric of individual and family identity* and a way people go on to live their lives (Walsh 1996:271). Beth

Savage, who was shot through the heart in a terrorist attack at a Christmas party, is witness to this:

*But all in all, what I must say is through the trauma of it all, I honestly feel richer. I think it's been a really enriching experience for me and a growing curve, and I think it's given me the ability to relate to people who maybe go through trauma.* (Krog 1998:80-81)

The participants in a life course study of resilience (Watt et al 1995:243) spoke up loudly and clearly to challenge the myth that trauma and stress beget illness inexorably, and that victims deserve pity or patronising sympathy rather than respectful dignity and a fair chance to defy the laws of self-fulfilling prophecy. I would like to add my voice to that of Festinger, whose study (1983) clearly shows that the dreaded expectations about adult adaptation of foster-reared children were not fulfilled, and leads her to ask:

*Why such a singular emphasis on vulnerability? ...so little confidence in young people's capacities to come to grips with the reality that no one's world is perfect? Why so little faith in the strength and resilience of children?* (Festinger 1983:253)

In another life course study (Werner & Smith 1992) 614 children born on Kauai in 1955 were followed through the age of 31. Even though half the children were born in poverty, 97% graduated from high school and about half the adults who had been troubled by mental health problems in their teens were functioning well. A supportive spouse was said to be the most important protective factor for the majority of these. They were said to be *loosening old ties that evoked memories of deprivation, loss and pain and what set them apart were life histories that revealed a pattern of gradual mastery, restoration and recovery* (Egeland et al 1993:524). In their own study, Egeland et al (1993:524) identified the following factors related to resilience: an experience of emotionally responsive care giving, early competence, an organised home environment, child capacities of intelligence and language, and a low overall level of risk.

This study avoids looking at "resilience" as an inborn, intrapersonal ability, seeking rather to move to an interpersonal conception of "resilience" as co-constructed by exploring the skills and knowledges expressed in relational resilience and how these are reflected in personal values, goals and dreams. Egeland et al (1993:518) propose that *rather than being a childhood given or a function of particular traits, the capacity for resilience develops over time in the context of environmental support*. I would like to extend this view and to describe resilience by looking at a history of unique outcomes despite trauma. The histories of resiliency skills and unique outcomes can be traced and richly described in narrative pastoral therapy. It can also be traced in stories about the family (of origin and choice), in the community environment, and in the faith community, since relational resilience involves organisational patterns, communication and problem-solving processes, community resources, and affirming belief systems (Walsh 1996:262).

### 3.2.3 Shared beliefs and narratives that contribute to "resilience"

Spiritual values and a cultural heritage provide meaning and purpose beyond the family unit (Walsh 1996:273) and has an influence on how people make sense of a crisis situation and give meaning to it. Another life course study of "resilience" (Watt et al 1995:233) found that 43% of the

participants relied on spirituality (usually in a religious context) to help them cope with severe stress; 30% engaged in psychotherapy and 26% utilised both. 96% of the participants also attributed their "resilience" to a *spontaneously arising inner drive which a slight majority attributed to a religious origin and the remainder considered a natural impulse for survival*. "God gave me the strength to continue no matter how difficult the obstacles" was reported to be a common response (Watt et al 1995:233). The value of religious affiliations in giving meaning to traumatic experiences and in enabling resistance to its effects is explored in this study. How "resilience" is sustained by beliefs is also explored with some of the participants. Reflections follow in chapters 4, specifically in section 4.15 (*Acknowledging and Re-membering the Lord*) and towards the end of chapter 5.

According to Walsh (1996:261) shared beliefs and narratives that foster a sense of coherence, collaboration, competence, and confidence are vital in coping, because narrative coherence helps to make meaning of crisis experiences. The power of *moral and spiritual sources of courage as a life-sustaining force of conviction* that help people overcome hardship has also been noted (Dugan & Coles 1989 in Walsh 1996:265). This study aims to reflect on such beliefs and narratives by exploring stories of hope and "resilience" in the face of trauma. How narrative pastoral therapy can assist clients in re-engaging with experiences of trauma so as to give voice to such stories, is also illustrated and reflected on in the following chapters.

The resiliency concept has already been found in the narratives of the subjects interviewed in other research projects (Liddle 1994:169). Plummer and Knudson-Martin (1996) conducted a study titled *Narratives of escape: A hermeneutic study of resiliency*, in which they examined the structure of narratives told by well-functioning adults who were "at risk" as children. The study found images associated with resiliency in the face of severe stress were all related to the theme of escape. The dimensions of this theme that they explored included a variety of constructs which will be discussed in the next few paragraphs (Plummer & Knudson-Martin 1996:580-582). Firstly they found narratives reflected dual images of stress and competency:

*....I guess I felt...this being in two worlds. There is this world of lightness and normalcy where you're with friends or at school or at work or wherever. Then this sort of underworld. Of wretched things that are happening...I often felt just right in between the two - a foot in both worlds.*

This dual image was shared by some of the participants in this study as will become particularly clear in chapter 4, when the client agreed with the outsider witnesses' ideas that she had to *carry a double burden of living in two worlds*.

Secondly Plummer and Knudson-Martin (1996:581) found different kinds of escape patterns. The narratives at the focus of that study spoke of physical escape, by going towards or away from a place, person or thing through friends, music, reading, living alone or staying in one's room; and emotional distancing, through *depression, anorexia, dissociation and removing my spirit*; or emotional shutdown, where storytellers spoke of *going catatonic, shutting down* or being *blanked out all the time* (Plummer & Knudson-Martin 1996:581).

*One of the sanctuaries in our home was around music. We had a piano and we each played an*

*instrument...things like reading and music were places where we were safe. It was something that we agreed upon.*

*I spent years disassociating. That was one of my major survival mechanisms. When I was remembering and talking about things that happened, ...ummn... I usually use the third person. It happened to her.*

*...I really hoped I was going to die young! I would have to cope with the level of pain. I'd go catatonic at times. In a way that was rebuilding. No one could hurt me when I was that way.*

Daydreaming as a resource or source of hope, which sprung from experiences, books, movies or felt needs, was also identified as an image associated with "resilience" (Plummer & Knudson-Martin 1996:582).

*My biggest daydream as being taken care of. That someone would see what a hard time I was having. Or that I would even become sick...*

*I had angels with me. And that was probably the most powerful light. And I have often wondered if I made them up. And then I realised it doesn't matter...That is my reality - as an adult now, and certainly very powerful for me as a child.*

Another image Plummer and Knudson-Martin (1996:582) identified was a *window of hope*. Although the negative was mostly stronger than the positive in the narratives, the storytellers *create their own window of hope even if it is in their mind*.

*I loved to look at the sky...it's a way of leaving. And I used to go into the clouds. Or at night I'd be with the stars. It was very wonderful. The stars were very powerful and very inviting. There is darkness here, but there is escape.*

Similar images were used by participants in this study, for example going to *look for a rainbow* or being able to *look at clouds* and appreciate them.

Other documented descriptions of "resilience" include having an optimistic bias, by *latching on to any excuse for hope and faith in recovery*, and holding on to beliefs which allow one to retain hope in the face of a grim situation (Taylor in Walsh 1996:265) as well as utilising the healing power of positive emotions through humour and laughter (Cousins in Walsh 1998:265). The importance of social networks for support in crisis and of group interventions for people facing similar challenges as a source of positive coping resources, have all been documented (Walsh 1996:265). I hope that the stories of the co-researchers of this study will also contribute to the evolution of the resiliency notion in terms of my preferred conception of it: as those unique stories of resistance to problems related to traumatic experiences, and their effects, which form part of all people's lived experience but are often over-looked.

### **3.3 Ways of looking at trauma and its effects**

Much has been written about trauma and its effects, especially since Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was first included in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1980 (McBride & Armstrong 1996:5). The DSM IV concept of PTSD defines trauma as occurring when both of the following are present: *the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to the*

*physical integrity of self or others and the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror* (American Psychiatric Association 1994:427-428). Van der Kolk (1987:2-3) added that *the essence of psychological trauma is the loss of faith that there is order and continuity in life*.

McBride and Armstrong (1995:5-16) emphasise the need to address the spiritual dynamics of the effects of trauma. They hold that spirituality can be understood as *a connection or relationship to self, to others, the world or universe, and to God* (1995:6) and quote Thayer (1965:55) as saying *...spirituality is that specifically human capacity to experience, be conscious of, relate to a dimension of power and meaning transcendent of the world of sensory reality*. Many people report that trauma has made them feel cut off from these connections. The *energy, creative force, or general power for living* that some associate with spirituality, appears to be blocked (McBride & Armstrong 1995:8). Treatment phases for trauma that address spirituality suggested by McBride and Armstrong (1995:8) could include making use of religious metaphors related to safety and trust, and exploring the spiritual losses that could be related to traumatic experiences. They believe that people might reconcile with trauma if their world view can begin to include events which harm innocent persons, and move away from believing the victim is evil or the cause of trauma. These aspects of their view could be incorporated in a narrative approach to pastoral therapy and this is partially why I view narrative pastoral therapy as an appropriate model for trauma counselling.

I believe deconstructing the larger social and political context in which trauma is experienced and the use of externalising conversations in narrative pastoral therapy could facilitate the above mentioned reconciliation. Narrative pastoral therapy is an appropriate model for *our contemporary world [in which], more than ever before, multiple worlds of experience, perceptions, value and spirit are coming together, crowding and, hopefully, mutually influencing one another* (Roy 1992:153). It responds to the ancient spiritual healers' definition of illness as being *trapped in one level of reality and of healing as a restoring of the ability to experience all levels of the reality of their spirit* (McBride & Armstrong 1995:13). How narrative pastoral therapy might strive to do this will now be discussed briefly and then explored by means of the case study in chapter 4 and the descriptions of group work in chapter 5.

### **3.4 A narrative approach to trauma and "resilience"**

In many psychotherapeutic practices related to dealing with trauma, revisiting the original traumatic experience as a way of breaking free of it, is an imperative. Behavioural treatments for example use *imaginal flooding or implosion therapy*, which consists of repeated imaginal presentation of the traumatic event until it no longer evokes high levels of anxiety (Weaver 1993:400). However, for some, recounting trauma is comparable to reliving the experience. Harvey (1996:9) points out that traumatic recall in therapy can re-traumatise people and stresses the importance of being sensitive to cultural and community beliefs, values and resources of clients. Honwana (1999), who did research on local knowledge and trauma healing of war-affected children in Angola and Mozambique, confirms that the socio-cultural context contributes to local people preferring to *start afresh once certain ritual procedures, which do not necessarily involve verbal expression of the*

*affliction, have been performed.* These rituals represent a symbolic break with the past, by for example washing the body in a river so that *the dirt of the war would go away*, and burning the hut and clothes brought from the war. *Cleansing rituals are centred around beliefs in the power of spiritual beings, central to people's sense of well-being and security* (Honwana 1999:31). The ancestral spirits and other spirits are offered sacrifices, witnessed by family and the community, since it is believed that war-related psychological trauma is directly related to the anger of the spirits of those killed and it could "pollute" the whole community. *Recounting the traumatic experiences would thus be like opening a door for harmful spirits to penetrate the community* (Honwana 199:34).

I agree with Honwana (1999:31) that *the way people express, embody and give meaning to their afflictions are generally tied to a specific cultural context.* Biomedical psychotherapeutic notions of mental distress constitute "western" social and cultural constructs. Diagnosis and individual treatment models which are grounded in modern psychological paradigms often ignore other ways of understanding health and healing.

Narrative practices also challenge the notion that dominant western psychotherapeutic models are universal and applicable everywhere. It aims to be sensitive to beliefs and values and rests on the premise that *there is no excuse for people to experience re-traumatisation within the context of therapy.* Distress yes, re-traumatisation no (White 1995:85). Gamezy's (1993:130) caution that signs of emotional distress do not necessarily suggest a breakdown of resilient behaviour, then also applies in a narrative approach, which creates space for the expression of distress, but not with the theory of catharsis as driving force. Narrative practices question practices which are based on the theory of catharsis which *obscures the critical dimension of meaning.* White (1995:85) asks some important questions:

*In requiring people to return to the site of trauma, are we not reproducing conditions that are entrapping, that are dispossessing people of choice?*

*...are we not also unwittingly reproducing this culture's phobia about flight... and its imperative of "facing up"?*

*And in this complicity, are we not closing down the possibilities that might be available to people for honouring the special skills and the personal qualities that made it possible for them to navigate through the dark hours of their lives and into the present?*

I agree with White (1995:87) that *it is possible and desirable for people to find options for giving voice to their experiences of abuse and other forms of trauma in ways that are profoundly healing for them, and in ways that they judge to be entirely expressive.* It is also important to consider that all expressions of experience stand within a system of meaning. This is why narrative practices stress the importance of continually consulting people about *what they perceive the effects of our work with them to be*, throughout the process of therapy; and about how *the reinterpretation and expressions of their experience are affecting the shape of their lives, and about what they understand to be the limitations and possibilities associated with our conversations.* They are thus assisted to take an active role in monitoring the real effects of the expressions of their experiences. This was also my aim during this study, and is reflected in some questions written about in chapter

4 and in the feedback questions (see appendix 2) at the end of the group meetings described in chapter 5.

Narrative pastoral ways aim to move away from the stigmatising burden of restrictive myths that pathologising models have perpetuated. They offer an alternative way of looking at trauma, which could lead to alternative ways of living after trauma. Without authoritative impositions of the therapist, people are enabled to find alternative expressions of the trauma, since with narrative pastoral practices they will find themselves standing in alternative territories of their lives. In these territories they can get in touch with different and more positive stories of their identity, which make it possible for them to give different meanings to their experiences. This in turn enables them to express these experiences in ways that are not likely to be re-traumatising of them (White 1995:86).

Narrative pastoral practices allow the therapist and client to experience both sadness and joy; to be joined both in outrage and hope. It creates a context in which alternative stories of people's lives can be celebrated and honoured; in which *other accounts of their identities are being powerfully authenticated*. It draws inspiration from the steps people take to *dispossess perpetrators of their authority* and in reclaiming preferred territories of their lives. It thus sees people *having the "last say" about their lives* (White 1995:86). The questions asked in an externalising conversation focus on the process of recruitment employed by the negative stories of identity which reflected the truth of their "nature" that have been capturing them. This triggers a reinterpretation and provides a basis for *renaming the dominant plots of their lives - away from themes of personal culpability, and towards exploitation, tyranny, abuse, and so on*. These externalising conversations can be considered as "deconstructing" conversations (White 1995:88).

A significant skill related to this theme is that of discernment. Once clients have explored the real effects of trauma, they have an opportunity to see how what it says about their identity differs from those values, intentions, dreams and beliefs identified through exploring unique outcomes. "Resilience" then becomes those day-to-day experiences that fit with self-care rather than self-abuse. The counterplot of survival, resilience, protest and resistance then also becomes more clearly articulated and thickened and people can *identify preferred accounts of their wants, tastes, desires, purposes, goals, hopes and so on* (White 1995:95).

Narrative practices' attention to the social, cultural and political context of trauma and victimisation is similar to that of the ecological model used in community psychology. Both explore how the community can be a source of recovery and resilience (Harvey 1996:7). According to White (1995:88) *to assist people to establish an account of the politics of their experience helps to undermine the self-blame and the shame that is so often experienced in relation to the abuse itself*.

Cultural differences and traditional healing methods could be explored in a process of meaning making, so that the client's beliefs are privileged in therapy.

Hopefully this study will show that narrative pastoral therapy can play a significant part in fostering resilience and recovery as set out in Harvey's (1996:11-13) multidimensional definition of recovery:

*authority over the remembering process* (remembering the events in a context that adds meaning to it); *integration of memory and affect* (recollection of initial distress and naming contemporary feelings of distress and outrage); *symptom mastery* (the counterplot of ability to predict and manage symptoms); *self-esteem and self-cohesion* (resistance to self-blame and shame, and engaging in self-care); *safe attachment* (grieving what was lost and gaining support) and *meaning making* (mourning the traumatic events in the past and finding meaning which is *life-affirming and self-affirming*).

### 3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter some of the meanings attached to the concept "resilience" were deconstructed. The conceptions that I prefer to differ from are those grounded in a pathological oriented framework that view people as fundamentally "at risk" because of trauma. These conceptions do not fit with the social construction view I hold of reality, since it does not allow space for multiple realities and the new possibilities created by attending to neglected stories of people's lives. I also prefer to differ from approaches to trauma which are based on the theory of catharsis, as explained in this chapter, since it does not fit with the collaborative stance that forms part of a narrative approach to pastoral therapy.

The "resilience" concept that I prefer and privilege, as explored in this chapter, is that of the unique exceptions that are part of people's lived experience despite traumatic experiences. These stories are often not privileged because of the dominance of discourses and self-narratives related to the negative effects of traumatic experiences. Descriptions of pastoral therapeutic conversations guided by the narrative metaphor and narrative practices, and not by the theory of catharsis, follow in the next two chapters. Chapter 4 tells the story of Thandi's resistance to the effects of the trauma, after the experience of being physically abused by her favourite brother. It also contains descriptions of how *saying hullo again* (White 1988:29) to her father, whom she lost at age 15, has helped her attach new meaning to almost forgotten events. In this chapter is also shown how narrative maps can be used as guidelines in pastoral therapy.

Chapter 5 describes how narrative ideas were used to work with a group of girls, identified by the school counsellor to be resilient despite trauma. In this group Harvey's (1996:11-14) definition of resiliency was confirmed. This included the following skills: remembering the events in a context that adds meaning to it, resisting self-blame and shame, engaging in self-care; grieving what was lost, gaining support, mourning the traumatic events in the past and finding meaning which is *life-affirming and self-affirming*. It also became evident how the skills and knowledges of living in the school community were mobilised to help the participants cope in other domains of living.

## CHAPTER 4: CO-CONSTRUCTING ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIVING AFTER TRAUMA

*It is amazing. The links that I make - like the links about my dad feeling proud of me - those things actually never occurred to me until I spoke to you. Most of the things I've said have just come up to me now - just now - like in this instance. It is amazing what this talking can do for you. And I work out some conclusions and stuff while I speak to you. When I go back to the hostel I think "Oh, I worked this out" and I could not work it out while I was by myself. It is amazing.*

(Thandi 1999: Interview)

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I seek to illustrate how pastoral narrative practices can facilitate preferred, alternative ways of being in the world despite having experienced trauma. The alternatives provided by a pastoral narrative approach will be illustrated by means of a case study, which shows how the approach has been used. Questions set at the outset of this study (see section 1.4) will be addressed and highlighted in this chapter and thus the purposes of the study (see section 1.5) should be accomplished. This does however not imply that final answers were looked for or found, but rather that more questions can be asked. It should become evident how the concept "resilience" can be more richly described when linked to unique outcomes - ways of being that do not fit with the dominant plot of trauma's negative effects. The description of the conversations with a client, Thandi, could also serve as an example of the possibilities for social transformation and new meanings that can be derived at through therapeutic pastoral conversations guided by the narrative metaphor.

### 4.2 How a pastoral narrative approach can make one-to-one therapy more community based

Although most of the conversations with Thandi were on a one-to-one basis, many of the narrative maps used as guidelines within one-to-one therapy broaden the process in a variety of ways to include others from the various communities the client belongs to. These ways are illustrated in this chapter. Examples include consulting Thandi about the role that faith and Christian friends have played in her life, the invitation of a close friend to a session, consulting the school counsellor about what she has witnessed about Thandi within the school community, meeting with her mother to celebrate the membership of her deceased father in their lives in a ritual of appreciation, inviting outsider witnesses and using Thandi as a consultant in group work. Chapter 5 describes narrative work in a group set-up, which more obviously addresses the need for approaches to therapy that are not only one-to-one, but more community based (see section 1.3).

In line with my desire to explore ways therapy can be more community based and in line with the TRC's comment that *victims and perpetrators alike need healing* (1998:3), we entertained the possibility of inviting other members of the family to therapy, including the brother who assaulted Thandi. Although Thandi would have loved to have them there, she did not believe they would be motivated enough and it would go against the tradition of family secrets. She did not want to discuss the assault with her brother, and doubted that he would do so. We co-authored a letter to her brother to invite him to therapy and to share Thandi's dream for the family with him, but Thandi decided not to give it to him. She thought he was *trying to make up for it* by being nice to her and chatting to her often.

### 4.3 Maps that guided co-creating alternative ways of living after trauma

As stated in chapter 2, I prefer a narrative approach to pastoral therapy, since it fits with my postmodern, social-construction view of reality and theology. It might be feasible to start the description of how narrative pastoral therapy enabled myself and Thandi to co-create alternative ways of living after trauma, with a few general ideas related to the approach.

How a narrative approach differs from some other approaches of dealing with trauma, which could re-traumatise people, has already been touched on in chapter 2. In a narrative approach, as with the "not knowing" approach of Anderson and Goolishian (1992), the client is considered the expert on her life. In line with narrative practices I strove for transparency and accountability, and tried to maintain this by deconstructing my power as therapist and by making the therapeutic process a collaborative one. Before I continue, it could also be helpful for the reader to be made aware of the narrative maps which guided this process. *Statement of position maps* (White 1998: Workshop) were used to externalise the effects of trauma in various domains of living. The client was invited to give an experience-near name to these effects or problems (rather than a pathologising diagnosis such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Depression). The dominant plot that trauma had been painting of the client's life was exposed and when the client was invited to state the position she held on its effects, it was possible to derive at ways of living that she preferred. By eliciting liberating stories to compete with the constraining, dominant narrative the client could re-author her life (Sheinberg 1992:202).

A *statement of position map* also guided an exploration of "resilience" as witnessed in unique outcomes. Rich and thick descriptions were co-created through landscape of action and landscape of identity questions, which form part of the process of co-authoring alternative stories and thickening the counter plot. The counter plot was further thickened by various maps of re-telling, such as interviewing the therapist as the client; *saying hullo again*; *re-remembering and taking-it-back practices*; *audience retelling*; and *definitional ceremonies* (White 1998: Workshop). Letters were used as therapeutic documents, and outsider witnesses and audiences were invited to join in the co-constructing of the client's preferred self-narrative. These maps are illustrated in this chapter.

I strove to let these maps guide the therapeutic process, albeit not in any specific order or as a fixed technique. Kogan and Gale (1997:101-126) share my concern that it is important not to view these maps or practices as techniques for doing postmodern therapy, since techniques imply a centred therapist who is doing something to the client, rather than a participant. Narrative maps guided my writing about the process as well. Since the application of many of these maps are illustrated in the letters I wrote to the client, some of them are included in the text. Firstly, however, I would like to privilege Thandi's voice in the next section with a few excerpts from a conversation that followed in response to a taped conversation between me (the therapist who represented the client) and David Epston (see section 4.4). I will briefly discuss this narrative practice before continuing with the first of many excerpts which will be woven into the text. More excerpts of the combination of the two conversations (mine with David Epston and mine with Thandi while listening to the tape of the first

conversation) are attached as Appendix 1.

#### 4.4 Interviewing the therapist as the client

Johnella Bird and David Epston, of the Family Therapy Centre in Auckland, New Zealand, developed the training and *therapeutic practice of interviewing the therapist as the client* (Epston 1999: Personal correspondence). I was privileged to be interviewed by David Epston (in a workshop held in Pretoria, 1999) as Thandi. Once I obtained her consent and after "introducing" Thandi in her absence, I was interviewed as if I were her. In our next two meetings, Thandi had the opportunity to listen to the taped interview. The tape was paused after David Epston's questions so as to give her the opportunity to answer for herself. We consequently listened to my answers (representing Thandi) and she could reflect on how I answered. This narrative practice is closely related to the map of audience re-telling and the idea of seeing oneself through someone else's eyes. In the excerpts included in the text the client's words (Thandi's words) are preceded by CLIENT. My responses as the therapist are recorded as those of ILSE, and my responses as representative of the client are recorded as those of THANDI.

As a therapist I too found the experience very valuable. In terms of my relationship with Thandi it was valuable in that I got a fresh appreciation for the steps she had already taken against the influence of trauma in her life and how difficult this sometimes was. On another level, I found the experience of being interviewed by David Epston to be one in which I could learn about the kinds of questions that are most interesting. It assisted me in maintaining accountability and transparency, since it required of me to reflect on the questions I have been asking. Questions related to me as Thandi's therapist were very valuable indeed in terms of the reflection they required of my own questions to her and on how I thought she saw the process we were involved in. I appreciated the opportunity of reflecting on our perceptions of our work together, since it opened up new questions. Thandi was given a copy of the original transcript, as well as the one with her answers recorded.

#### 4.5 Thandi's ideas about what our conversations have been around

DAVID: What do you think she (Thandi) would say your counselling has been around? What has it been up to? What has it been about?

CLIENT: *Okay, we've been talking about how I could help myself...avoiding being very stressed and think differently ....to resist all those stressful things happening in my life and looking into the better side of things. And we have been looking at how I could be a help to my family. ...Basically we've been looking at how I could cope with things.*

ILSE: Do you think we've found some things?

CLIENT: *O yes, on my side, because I've come up with a lot of answers for questions...not really questions, but a lot of things that I've worried about. Everything has been becoming clearer to me as I've been speaking to you...*

ILSE: What do you think about what I said, that we've been looking at the skills and knowledges that you have to use against the effects of trauma (which Thandi called Evil Spirit and Negative

Spiral)?

CLIENT: *That's so true. You've asked me how can I use that. And mostly you've been asking me and I have been coming up with answers, whereas before I had no clue what was going on...so you have been encouraging me to come up with my answers...*

DAVID: If I asked Thandi...Thandi, where has this counselling got you in terms of its intentions, which were to use your skills and knowledges, or to know what they are, to use against Evil Spirit and Negative Spiral? What would Thandi say to me right now?

CLIENT: *I knew that somewhere in me I could deal with those things and I can actually come out with solutions by myself. I don't need any other peoples' help. Where I would blame everything onto the family before.. you know, no-one is helping me in the family...I can't blame everything on them, cause I'm the one who's got... I can actually turn by myself, as I did it with you. Maybe I would need someone like you to sort of jerk out these solutions.*

ILSE: What did you find instead of blame and sympathy (which you expected) in our talking?

CLIENT: *I found people who gave me ideas and made me try for solutions and who supported me and encouraged me into fighting through - they gave me the strength to fight through. They gave me solutions, instead of ridiculing...With the questions that you gave me I managed to get some more answers to certain questions.*

#### **4.6 Reflections about the referral**

Thandi was referred to me by the school counsellor. In line with the contextual approach to practical theology that I prefer and with the Just Therapy approach (Waldegrave 1990:7), the gender, culture, social and economic contexts of the person seeking help should be taken into account, so as to address issues of fairness. The client, Thandi (18 years old), is a black, Xhosa-speaking woman, who grew up in a township on the Cape Flats and is attending a predominantly white school on scholarship. I appreciated the consent she gave the school counsellor to outline her situation to me briefly so that I had time to consider some of the possible effects of our cultural and socio-economic differences. I was concerned about deconstructing my power as therapist and tried to do this by making the process a collaborative one and by being transparent about the fact that she is the expert on her life: I had to learn from her about the discourses informing and forming the different communities in which she lived. I respect her expert knowledge on her culture, and acknowledged my eagerness to be reminded if I overlooked related things. I felt privileged to meet someone with such a wide range of experience, who has since introduced me to aspects of the different communities she is involved in, and also the discourses which she prefers to differ from.

#### **4.7 Being introduced to some of Thandi's skills and knowledges**

I agree with Michael White (1998: Workshop) that clients should be present if possible when spoken about. I thus arranged that the school counsellor would introduce me to the client in her presence. I was subsequently introduced to many of Thandi's skills and knowledges when I interviewed the school counsellor about things that she appreciated about Thandi. My aim was to

get to know Thandi apart from trauma and other problems as well as to afford her the opportunity of seeing herself through someone else's eyes. This process partially answers the question in chapter 1: *How can pastoral narrative therapy make a contribution to support skills and knowledges of healing?* The counsellor spoke of many of the qualities and skills Thandi has within the school and sport communities that she has been a witness to and these were recorded (please see Letter One). Thandi enlarged on these qualities and skills, which left us with a rich description. In later conversations these knowledges and skills were reflected on in terms of the ways they are helpful and support alternative ways of living after trauma. Richer descriptions were also continuously co-created, for example those skills mentioned by the outsider witness team (please see Letter Four), and Thandi became more aware of how these skills were related to the "resilience" she had shown in her life.

#### 4.8 The problem-saturated version trauma had of Thandi's story

With Thandi's permission the counsellor briefly told me about a traumatic experience Thandi has had - she was violently assaulted by her older brother. She had also lost her father, the only breadwinner, two years previously, which was traumatic for her and her family. Thandi felt that if her father had still been alive *things would have been different*. She remembered his words: *She is going to bring light to this family*, and realised that she would like to live up to this, although it seemed impossible. Problems in the family not only included domestic violence, but also alcohol abuse, misunderstandings, joblessness and *irresponsibility*. Many of the problems seemed to be related to the socio-economic context and to cultural and gender issues, and I explored this with her. Other concerns Thandi had was that her mother did not want her to continue her education after matric; and socially she was having difficulty coping with living in two worlds - attending a school in a wealthy "white" area in Cape Town on a scholarship, and spending time with family in a township.

In our conversations the effects of some of these problems were explored. A quote by Freedman and Combs (1996:16-17) highlights the importance of keeping track of the social context in which a problem occurs:

*As we work with the people who come to see us, we think about the interactions between stories that they are living out in their personal lives and the stories that are circulating in their cultures - both their local culture and the larger culture. We think about how cultural stories are influencing the way they interpret their daily experience and how their daily actions are the stories that circulate in society.*  
(Freedman & Combs 1996:16-17)

Thandi said that she felt confused by the mixed messages she was getting from her family (they believe *families should keep their problems to themselves* and treat it like a *family secret*), and from her friends and teachers at school (who believe one should *cry things out* and talk about it). An excerpt from a conversation illustrates this dilemma:

DAVID: ... How would you describe what was going on in your mind?

CLIENT: *I would say that it was like a huge conflict inside me, between wrong and right.*

ILSE: What was wrong and what was right?

CLIENT: *Telling was wrong and not telling was right. You know, from our point of view and from how I was brought up.*

She has come to realise that *just to keep smiling* does not get her far and that is why she was willing to speak to the counsellor and to me, although she experienced this as a *big step* to take. When I wondered out loud what her ability to take the step despite this conflict told us about her, she owned the skill of courageous actions.

#### 4.9 The client is the expert

I share the concerns expressed by White (1995:85) about the many therapeutic practices related to dealing with trauma which make revisiting the original traumatic experience as a way of breaking free of it, an imperative. As noted in chapter 3, narrative practices rest on the premise that *there is no excuse for people to experience re-traumatisation within the context of therapy*. I thus questioned the notion of talking Thandi through a debriefing of the events of the day that she was beaten. I did not feel comfortable with the idea of “forcing” her to narrate things she did not want to and decided to let her be the expert on what she wanted to share in the next session. She said that she would prefer not to talk about the details of *the beating*, since it made her feel too much pain. Here follows some of her reflections:

ILSE: Are there ways that I made it easier for you to speak about things?

CLIENT: *I don't know. I just get this strange feeling when I talk about it. I get scared...*

ILSE: And the way we speak about it, is that okay?

CLIENT: *Yes, as long as I don't have to sit here and go through it in detail, and with you just listening. It is fine the way we did it.*

ILSE: Would you not have liked it if that was the way we did it? What would you not have liked?

CLIENT: *I don't know. I would just have to speak, and I know you would be listening, but it would seem like I was all by myself. I would not feel right.*

ILSE: Would you have felt isolated?

CLIENT: *Yes, and I would not have felt that you were helping me at all.*

ILSE: Really? This is very interesting to me, because I am trying to learn more about what are good ways of helping people who experienced trauma and you are someone who can teach me.

CLIENT: *It would have been as if you were just putting me by myself, solve your own things, I'm not helping you, I'll just listen to you. Even in class, when the teacher speaks, you keep nodding your head so she understands you are listening, but everyone is quiet, so she doesn't know if you understand what she is saying.*

ILSE: What in what I did, didn't make you feel isolated?

CLIENT: *You contributed and you took notes; you wrote (letters) back and you made me see what I was saying and you made me see that you actually knew what I was talking about and you actually heard what I was talking about. And you had your own ideas on the one side. You made me think; you made me come up with solutions and things like that. We interacted, you know; you helped me onto helping myself.*

ILSE: And if I had gone through everything that had happened step by step, what do you think the effect of that would have been?

CLIENT: *You know, going through what happened - It just brings this feeling inside, even now when I am talking about it, I just don't like it.*

ILSE: So is that not something that is helpful to you?

CLIENT: *...When I'm not speaking about it in a way where I have to describe exactly what happened it becomes locked in this other little closet inside me, but once I have to speak about it in that way, it comes out and spreads inside me...*

ILSE: And this locked away part... is it comfortable when it is there, or uncomfortable?

CLIENT: *It is fine if it is there. It is comfortable.*

DAVID: ...What counselling practice did she use?

CLIENT: *The way you approached me. If I'd spoken to somebody else, I bet you they would have asked me, so tell me: What happened? Tell me in detail.... You sort of knew what happened to me, but you let me to speak about other aspects as well...*

ILSE: And what in the way the school counsellor spoke to you helped you to speak to me again?

CLIENT: *She also didn't dig up for details and things like that. And she told me that she's got this friend who would like to help and if I don't want to say anything to her, it is fine, I don't have to say anything. It always makes people feel safe and under control to know when you tell them they don't have to talk about things.*

ILSE: Did I manage to give you the feeling that you were determining what we were going to talk about?

CLIENT: *Yes. And you asked me a lot of questions, you didn't just tell me what you thought about me. You learnt from what I wanted to say about myself.*

ILSE: So was that something you found helpful: the fact that I asked questions instead of telling you what I thought?

CLIENT: Yes.

ILSE: Why was that helpful?

CLIENT: *Because you learnt about me, a person; and I also learnt a lot of things about myself. Because as you asked me these questions, these questions lead me into answering things that I actually never thought of before. It's the way that you asked the questions and the questions that you asked.*

Our conversations were thus not based on the theory of catharsis, which *obscures the critical dimension of meaning*, but rather explored the meanings that the experience had talked her into and the alternatives that were available and expressed in unique outcomes. New meanings or narratives thus arose in the act of conversation, rather than in deliberate or planned interventions (Sheinberg 1992: 202). I also did not engage in a kerugmatic, preaching approach, but strove to let Thandi guide me as to what she wanted us to be speaking about.

#### **4.10 The effects of trauma: *Negative Spiral* and *Evil Spirit***

The following sections address the question: *How can pastoral narrative therapy contribute and*

play a role in understanding the consequences of traumatic experiences? Thandi expressed a lot of distress because of what her brother had done to her. She had really been hurt physically, but felt that the greater hurt was the loss of a *very special bond* that bound her to her brother. She *lost trust and respect* for him - things that meant a lot to her, since she used to look up to him. She also *lost confidence* in her family. After *the beating* she experienced sensations of being hit (*like a wind and a clapping sound*). It made her experience fear.

#### 4.10.1 Externalising *Negative Spiral* and finding unique outcomes

Upon my questions (to seek an experience-near name for what she was going through) she said that since the experience it was as if she linked various negative experiences and memories together. This could be called *Negative Spiral*. She realised that *the beating* played a part in accelerating and intensifying *Negative Spiral* in areas of her life where it was not before. An externalising conversation revealed that *Negative Spiral* makes her feel terrible; *it ruins her life*; it is like *a pain inside*; it makes her *hate* herself and makes her *want to punish* herself. We explored the ways in which *Negative Spiral* works and some ways of countering its tactics. *Negative Spiral just wants everything to get down; it wants no progress*. In a statement of position she said that she did not want *Negative Spiral* in her life.

The questions: *How can pastoral narrative therapy contribute and play a role in better understanding "resilience" and healing in the face of trauma better? How can a pastoral narrative approach be used to re-engage with experience of trauma in a way that would give voice to stories of hope and "resilience"?* are partially answered through exploration of unique outcomes that lead to the authoring of new meanings and stories about identity. Thandi's words in the previous and following sections bear witness to this.

Griffin (1992:207) reflected that *looking back over a life, certain seemingly small events later take on the aura of prescience, as if pointing to what will come*. These words seem applicable in Thandi's life, where remembering her father's words "*She is going to bring light to the family*", which did not fit with the current version she had of her life, helped her to resist *Evil Spirit* (to be discussed shortly). Further examples will be given throughout the text. One example to start off with was that questions about unique outcomes noticed in previous conversations led Thandi to say that *being positive allows me, even if I fail, to think I can try again. This is a new way of thinking which I have learnt since coming to this school. I am just doing my best*. I agree with Weingarten (1998:11) that *simply believing that the current version of our lives is just that, a version, can promote the search for alternatives to a story that diminishes us in its performance*. These alternatives often bear witness to ways in which resilience forms part of most of our lives, although this is often overlooked.

#### 4.10.2 Externalising *Evil Spirit* and noticing unique outcomes

The effects of trauma were also experienced in the domain of Thandi's family life. Apart from the loss of trust in her brother, trauma intensified *Evil spirit*. She *described* the effects in terms of what

happened when she went home: *I changed totally (into someone uptight, negative, aggressive and inexpressive)*. She said it was like an *evil spirit that ruined everything* and made it impossible for her to be with her family in ways that she prefers. An externalising conversation followed in which the effects of Evil Spirit on her life was explored. Given our different cultures I was not sure if I understood her experience of Evil Spirit correctly. I checked with her about this in Letter Two, so as to ensure that I understood. She was asked to state what position she wanted to take towards it. She was very clear about the fact she did not like what Evil Spirit was talking her into, since she wanted *openness and communication* in her family. We could then explore these alternative ways of being in the world and the history of the values she held.

Evil Spirit played a big part in the lack of communication with her mother. This was problematic for her, especially since it threatened her dream of studying further after matric. I was interested in the notion of openness and communication in her family and my questions revealed unique outcomes which she expanded on. She realised for example that the fact that her mother came back to her after a misunderstanding and argument saying *I thought about what you were saying...* could indicate that she does indeed care and listens. We explored some ways of possibly improving communication with her mother (see Letter One), which Thandi tried out later and which enabled her to keep Evil Spirit at bay. She wrote to her mother, for example, and this led to conversation in which they were able to communicate their love and respect for each other. Naming Evil Spirit seemed to have been significant in fighting it, as the following excerpt shows:

ILSE: You mentioned that you can cope better. What have you learnt about that?

CLIENT: *Firstly with Evil Spirit at home...I wasn't really aware...I knew that there was something when I got home, that made me not want to do anything, but I wasn't actually aware that I could fight it, I could resist it - all these feelings I had.*

#### 4.11 Therapeutic documents

Epston (1994:31) sums up the rationale for therapeutic letters as follows: *...But the words in a letter don't fade and disappear the way conversation does; they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalising it.* Letters thus rescue the said from the saying of it (White 1998: Workshop) by using verbatim quotes and questions to tell the alternative story that is emerging along with the therapy. It documents history, current developments, and future prospects (Freedman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:112).

The letters included in this text could serve to show how narrative pastoral therapy can contribute and play a role in understanding the consequences of traumatic experiences, but also how it increases understanding "resilience" and healing in the face of trauma. How such therapy can contribute to changing the meanings attached to traumatic experiences should also become more clear. The *saying hullo again* (White 1988:29) map (which will be looked at later), for example, guided many of the questions related to the traumatic experience of losing her father at a young age. The influence of faith in the way the client has coped with the challenges posed by traumatic experiences is also explored in the letters.

#### 4.11.1 Letter One

*Dear Thandi*

*Thank you for introducing so many aspects of yourself to me today. With the help of the school counsellor I got to know you as someone I feel quite privileged to have met. Some of the things she appreciated about you (related to your talent and determination as a runner) included that you are a hard worker, can make plans, are willing to take on new things, get involved and are committed, that you don't give up even when things are not so easy, you are responsible, patient (you said you had to run with the pack), organised, helpful (offering advice if asked and able to help), and you know when to share responsibility and when to delegate. Which (if any) of these skills and knowledges that you have do you think might be useful to draw on in dealing with the problems that alcohol and violence have brought to your family?*

*You also admitted to going against very strong traditions in your family and culture by not keeping so called "family secrets" to yourself, even though it was hard for you to look critically at what is happening in your family. You also managed to do this despite quite strong opposition from your own people. How did you do it? What kind of person do you think is able to take a stand for what she believes to be right under such circumstances?*

*You refused to just "mind your own business", but are concerned and worried about the problems in your family. Would you describe yourself as someone with a passion for justice? Could this attitude perhaps be linked to your dad's vision: "She is going to bring light to this family"?*

*The counsellor thought that this stand of yours spoke of you as a courageous person - firstly in admitting that there was a problem and secondly speaking out about it despite coming from a tradition of "family secrets". This courage she spoke of also became apparent when she said that you did this despite being scared of facing reality and not being able to cope because of being really sad. You added that you didn't want to pretend any more. But you were confused by your family saying you shouldn't show your feelings, while others said you should cry it out and talk about things. Despite this, you told me that you've come to realise that "to just keep smiling doesn't bring one far" and that was why you think it is better for you to speak about things. What about yourself enabled you to make this discovery?*

*Whose voices might have supported this? Possibly Ms McDonid's [a teacher]? Or someone else?*

*The counsellor's description of you as someone who makes plans was confirmed for me when I learnt that you have already made a plan to try and give your mother a better understanding of why you wanted to continue your studies. The plan is to get your black running coach to make friends with her and speak to her. You have also learnt from previous experience that it is best not to back chat your mom, and said that it might be good to keep this in mind in future. We also spoke of the possibility of writing a letter of appreciation to your mom. Have you thought about these ideas any more? What were your thoughts?*

*Have you had any other ideas of things that worked in the past? Or new things to try in the future?*

*Would you agree that from our conversation your commitment to your family and the fact that you care for them became clear? We also spoke about the hope for future therapeutic conversations in your family. This was strengthened by the fact that your mother's comment "I thought about what you said earlier..." shows that she cares and that she hears what you are saying. We also speculated about whether the fact that your brother waited for you and spoke to you after he had beaten you, spoke of a possibility that he might want to change things. Can you think about more aspects of these or other things that give you hope?*

*I was pleased to hear that you have something to look forward to next year, since you have decided to study further, even though it is still hard to go against your mom. You said that you think that way will get you further. You also thought that your mom might actually agree because she feels that you "have power to change things at home", but she doesn't give you a chance. Why do you think she feels that you have that power? Would your dad agree? Why? Have you had any ideas on what might help her to give you a chance?*

*Thandi, thanks once again for sharing a part of your story with me. Good luck with your learner's licence test (If you have written it already, I hope it went well).*

*God bless, Ilse*

#### 4.11.2 Letter Two

*Dear Thandi*

*I want to thank you for sharing more aspects of your story with me last week. I appreciated your openness.*

*I was surprised to learn that being positive is "quite a new thing" for you, especially since I witnessed your positive response to failing your learner's licence a few moments before hand! How do you do it?*

*You said that Mrs Harris was one of the first people who inspired you to "start being positive". Are there any other people who have joined her voice in this regard?*

*What do think enabled you to listen to her advice then?*

*Could that fact that you "asked the Lord to help you" have made it easier? If so, in which ways?*

*What can you compare His help to? What is it like?*

*I was also wondering about the possibility of a connection between your "being positive" and all the plans you have got for this year (putting your studies first and to get a bursary so that you can study next year, running well; and getting closer to the Lord). How might "being positive" help you in "having great confidence" in these areas of your life?*

*When I asked about people from your community who might understand your need to study you mentioned a few people. Your aunt, who is close to your mom, was one. How might talking to her give you new ideas?*

*You also said: "Dad would be proud of me for doing something" (studying). Why?*

*What ideals and dreams did he have for your life?*

*What did he see in you when he said that you were going to "bring light to your family"? Which of the things he hoped for and saw in you are also important to you? Why?*

*I've asked a lot of questions already, but I am too curious about "Evil Spirit" not to ask a few more. Hope this is okay with you Thandi. If not, please tell me so that I can work on keeping curiosity in place. Do you think that Evil Spirit is the best name for what makes you change at home, or do you want to call it something else? Why?*

*Which qualities of the experience does the name you chose reflect?*

*You told me a bit about the effects that Evil Spirit has on you when you visit home. Some of the things Evil Spirit has managed to talk you into included: "I totally change and become uptight and aggressive. I am negative and this creates tension which can end in an explosion with my mom. I am horrible to people. I can't say 'I missed you'. I hesitate when I don't want to". Evil Spirit's tricks make "communicating and expressing what we feel" a problem in your family. What are some of Evil Spirit's special tricks?*

*Thandi, you said "I really don't like it (what Evil Spirit does), because it ruins everything." You also asked: "How can I help my family then" (if Evil Spirit keeps on standing in the way). What does this say about your hopes for the future?*

*And about your preferred way of being part of a family?*

*Can you think of a time or times when you noticed one of the tricks and was able to outwit Evil Spirit? How did you do it?*

*What would you call this ability to outwit Evil Spirit?*

*What is its history?*

*Thandi, I hope that some of my questions have made sense to you. I would appreciate feedback (please tell me if I am way off track!). I look forward to our conversation.*

*God bless, Ilse*

#### **4.12 Reflections about the therapeutic letters and the questions asked**

In our conversations and in my letters to Thandi I asked many landscape of action and landscape of identity questions, so as to give voice to an alternative story of Thandi's identity. I also asked her to take position on the effects of Evil Spirit and Negative Spiral, so as to get a richer description of her preferred ways of living after trauma and of her skills and knowledges in a variety of domains of living. Similar questions were also asked in the interview with the school counsellor, who previously acted as an audience to parts of Thandi's story which I could not have learnt about in one conversation.

Part of the taped interview with David Epston focused on the questions in therapy. Here follows a few excerpts which testify to Thandi's experience of questions in therapy:

CLIENT: ... *Because you always ask questions.*

DAVID: Yeah, they do, don't they, those therapists! Would you rather they didn't ask so many?

CLIENT: *No, I think the question part is the brilliant part of it, because I'm learning things while I'm sitting here.*

DAVID: How do you feel about those questions... Ilse's questions?

CLIENT: *(Jokingly) You're asking too many! No, they are very helpful, because I don't know if I would actually have come up with these thoughts if I wasn't asked about them. Some people have got whatever inside them, but then you just have to sort of dig it out. So that's what happened to me. I've got some brains somewhere there, but I need some people to help me.*

CLIENT: *It's not like curiosity in a bad way, but you would like to know .. how would she handle this. With this knowledge or what she knows, how would she go about... dealing with this.*

ILSE: Does this curiosity make you feel uncomfortable?

CLIENT: *No, it's fine! That's what makes me come up with solutions, because you sort of like wonder ...so you ask it from me and I come up with an answer, that's how I get to help myself.*

ILSE: So would you always welcome curiosity in the sessions ?

CLIENT: *Yes. I think it is sort of the best cure. Because if you weren't very curious about what I would do, then you wouldn't ask the questions that would pry out the answers from me.*

DAVID: ... Before you went to counselling, what did you think you were going to get into?

CLIENT: *Actually I had no idea. But then I thought I was getting to people who were going to ask me about my background, what I do: Do you smoke, Do you drink? Those type of things.*

ILSE: Those are also questions...

CLIENT: *Questions addressed in a different way. See, I think what is so clever about counsellors, is that they ask in a different way ...not any other person would ask, but they've got a way of asking those questions so that you don't feel like, you know, pressured...*

ILSE: Do you think you had any influence on the questions that were asked?

CLIENT: *Yes. From the information that you got from me, you got more questions, wanted to know more about me, interesting stuff. So the more I answered, the more you wanted to know, and the more I spoke about myself.*

ILSE: So that was a surprise to you?

CLIENT: *Yes. I didn't really know what to expect from counselling. I just thought of this person sitting, writing, asking me to tell them about my life. It was a pleasant surprise for me. It was exactly what I did not expect.*

I think these reflections by Thandi speak of the way some of the questions posed in our conversations and in the letters opened up new possibilities for her, also in terms of her identity. It leads to an alternative, good story which, according to Griffin (1992:24) also reveals the unknown, not in a psychodynamic sense, but by asking questions about lived experience, expressions of resilience and unique outcomes. Although some questions were aimed at deconstructing the larger discourse which informs certain interpretations of her experience, which also fits with my contextual approach, this could have been done more extensively.

I ended off the letters with *God Bless* since the client volunteered that she is a Christian and that the Lord has been instrumental in her life, and since I am a Christian too, I felt free to end the letter by asking God's blessing on her life.

#### 4.13 Saying hullo again

In Letter Two and Letter Three (which follows) I continued working with the *saying hullo again* (White 1988:29-38) metaphor introduced in our conversations. While acknowledging Thandi's pain in having to say goodbye to the material reality of having her father alive, our conversations and the letters focused on ways in which she was *saying hullo again* to her father. Focus was on *the incorporation of Thandi's lost relationship* with her father into her life now so as to assist the resolution of her grief (White 1988:29). Questions were asked about her *experience of her father's experience of her*, so as to reclaim preferred knowledges of herself. Excerpts of a transcript of one of the sessions illustrate the gains she made by remembering:

*My mother felt the same way. By losing him she felt that she's lost everything. And now she even mentioned that thing the other day - that I bring light to the family. She calls me the flower of the family. She calls me the flower... the fact that my dad saw it before I even came to this school, before anything changed...it is like a blessing to me...I think he saw me through the eyes of the Lord. ...They have always been so proud of me...Actually now it brings up this memory of when I started walking. My mom was so astounded. She came back from work and I walked. She couldn't believe it...This is amazing. It is amazing what this (conversation) can do for me, because it has always been in my memory but I have forgotten about it for long - for years. And it just came up to me now - just now!*

##### 4.13.1 Letter Three

Dear Thandi

*Thank you for our conversation today. I don't want to ask a lot of new questions in this letter, but would like to reflect on the impression of your dad you left with me. Someone once said: **Death ends a life but it cannot end a relationship.** The truth of this saying became apparent to me today as I was listening to you speaking about your dad. You said that reading my first letter to you jerked up memories:*

*"I always get sad when I think of my dad. I would like him to be around. I would like his presence around. I need his support... I just sometimes have this strong feeling that I really want to see him but there is nothing that can be done about that. I can just sit there and cry my eyes out. It is very painful when you know that nothing can be done about it. That's why I just feel sometimes that I should just forget about him. His loss..."*

*Are there times when you would prefer to continue feeling his presence around in your life and dreams?*

*How are you doing this already, apart from praying that you might dream about him?*

*You also said: "My mother felt the same way. By losing him she felt that she's lost everything". Could she (or someone else) help in continuing to give him a place in your life and feeling his presence around? If so, how?*

*You remembered that your mom "mentioned that thing - that I bring light to the family. She calls me the flower of the family. I feel honoured. I am the last born. The fact that my dad saw it before I*

*even came to the school, before anything changed. Even when I was young he said that I would bring light to the family. It is like a blessing to me".*

*What do you think your dad saw in you even when you were so young that made him say that?*

*If you were seeing yourself through your dad's eyes right now, what would you be noticing about yourself that you could appreciate?*

*What difference would it make to how you feel if you were appreciating this about yourself now?*

*What knowledge about yourself are you awakened to when you bring alive enjoyable things that your dad knew about you? What difference would it make if you kept this realisation alive everyday?*

*How could you let others (in the family too) know that you have reclaimed some of the discoveries about yourself that were clearly visible to your dad and that you also like?*

*How would remaining aware of your dad's words about you enable you to intervene and take steps in difficult situations in your life? In taking such steps what else do you think you might find out about yourself that could be important for you to know?*

*You said : "I think he (your dad) saw me through the eyes of the Lord. Maybe the Lord also thinks I can bring change in my family". What in you could lead the Lord to think so?*

*Would you agree with the Lord? Why?*

*In which ways has He assisted you in maintaining your preferred approach to communication and being together in the family? Do you believe that He will do so in the future too? How?*

*Thandi, thank you for sharing moments of amazement with me (like when you remembered how proud your mom was when you started walking!). I appreciate being allowed to walk with you in discovering and reclaiming such forgotten stories.*

*May God bless you, Ilse*

#### **4.14 How can these knowledges and skills be shared within a community/group?**

How these reclaimed knowledges and resiliency skills could be circulated and performed in front of an audience so as to have an effect in the shaping of her life, was also explored (White 1998: Workshop). Although her mother was hesitant to meet me, we arranged an occasion which proved to be one where re-remembering and taking-it-back could be practised. With her mother as an audience I interviewed Thandi about how her dad's ideas about her are still alive in her life now.

##### **4.14.1 Re-remembering and taking-it-back practices**

In our conversations we took time to reflect on our work so far, an imperative in narrative work (White 1998: Workshop). We also explored some of the relationships that are or were important in her life. *Re-remembering* is a practice developed by White (1997:22) based on Barbara Myerhoff's notion of "membered" lives. The metaphor of a club of life then opens up options for the exploration of how a person's club of life is membered. It suggests *possibilities for persons to engage in a revision of the membership of their club of life* (White 1997:23), by downgrading or upgrading specific memberships.

In line with my desire to remain aware of cultural differences I asked about people in her community who might understand what she is struggling with and whose voices she might want to re-member. At that stage she still felt quite isolated, but *re-membered* her dad's voice of support for her ideals and dreams. She also re-membered an aunt who studied after school. She thought her black running coach could perhaps speak to her mother about the importance of further education. In later conversations she *membered* the voices of two friends from her community who understood the problems her mother had in letting her go and her desire to continue her studies (White 1998: Workshop).

The notion of re-membering also suggests possibilities and provides opportunities for persons to more directly acknowledge the important and valued contributions that others have made to their lives. Practices of taking-it-back (acknowledging others' contributions) describe clients' lives more richly, while at the same time often making it possible for them to *experience the fuller presence of these figures in their lives, even when they are not available to be there in a material sense* (White 1997:23). We discussed the possibility of employing taking-it-back practices with these people. Thandi had conversations with the two people from her community who could understand her predicament: another young woman who was not living at home while studying (like Thandi intends to do next year); and her new boyfriend, who also attended a former model C school on scholarship. These conversations made her feel that she was *not alone and that others shared* her kinds of problems. According to White (1997:23) *this sense of being joined...and experiencing one's life more richly described, contributes to new possibilities for action*. This was the case for Thandi too and she felt that she could turn to them if Negative Spiral tried to trick her again.

The therapy became broader and more community oriented although the focus was one-on-one. Madigan and Epston (1995:257) coined the term "communities of concern" to describe groups of people who are struggling with similar problems and within which ideas and knowledge can be shared and circulated. By linking people involved in individual therapy, therapeutic communities can be encouraged. A good example of this is the Anti-anorexia Anti-bulimia League (Madigan & Epston 1995:257-276) where league members share their struggles and ideas for revising their relationships with anorexia and bulimia, including their knowledges about social, gender, and cultural aspects of the problem. Individual conversations can then also influence a whole community, where, for example, league members choose to take an active role in revising the definition of the problem in the culture at large. This could for example be done through educational programmes at schools (Freedman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:127).

As mentioned earlier, Thandi's mother was invited to one of our later sessions for a ritual of appreciation and re-membering both her mother and father's contributions to her life. Thandi had already taken many contributions that she valued back to her mother in a letter that she wrote to her. She said: *After I wrote that letter I felt alighted. It had taken something off my shoulders*. This meeting led to a rich description of the dreams that they both have for their family, namely a family which shows *love and appreciation of each other; which respects each other and the others' ideas;*

and in which peace reigns. They thought that as a team they could work together towards this dream. Thandi pointed out that the family could *love each other and boost each other even without money*. The value of appreciating family members was something they both learnt from Thandi's father. They recalled the appreciative names he had for Thandi as a little girl. Thandi also remembered his voice and his view of her as a successful child. His voice stood with the community saying *Ekunyamezele kukho umvuzo* (in perseverance there is gain), which Thandi and her mother chose as a motto for the family.

In our conversation Thandi also mentioned the problems that entrenched patriarchy has left them with, especially in terms of her mother's difficulty in taking responsibility (and others accepting this) for certain things after her father's death. I would have liked to deconstruct the power of patriarchy in their lives even further, but her mother's limited command of English restrained me. Although Thandi values the role her father used to play in the family, she feels that as a woman she can *handle things by herself* and she is sad that he is not there to witness this change in gender roles.

#### **4.15 Faith and the faith community's influence in alternative ways of living after trauma**

I was quite surprised by Thandi's positive attitude despite the big disappointment of failing her learner's license test immediately before one of our conversations. I asked a few questions as to the history of being positive and voices that stood with being positive despite her experiences of trauma. We explored what helped her in this regard and what contributed to difficulties. A richer description of some of the helpful things, such as asking the Lord to help, was also explored.

##### **4.15.1 Acknowledging and Re-remembering the Lord**

Thandi said *the relationship between me and my Lord has played a very big role in my life, also in showing me that things were not as they should be in my family*. As a pastoral therapist I was interested in getting an experience-near, rich description of Thandi's relationship with the Lord. I was particularly interested in how she heard His voice and how she managed to listen so well. She shared some experiences of God's help in her life and said *He was there and He is there*. She wanted her life to be according to His plan, but believes that this involves working towards it and being willing to listen and to learn from what is wrong, even if it is hard. She compared living her life according to the Lord's plan to running - practising and working hard to get good results. She also said *The Lord brightens my life, but I must be patient. I know that He is there and has the ability to help*. Questions about what enabled her to listen revealed that *the Lord says 'no' to Negative Spiral in my life, but I sometimes shut Him off*. That was something she wanted to change and she has been able to change it previously by continuously remembering the line *pray child pray*, which was written in a card that a friend gave to her. She also attributes part of her ability to speak out to listening to the Lord, as becomes clear in the following excerpt:

ILSE: How come you were able to do it (speak out) then despite that (tradition of secrets)?

CLIENT: *I don't know. I would say maybe the Lord spoke to me and said this is the way you can help yourself....*

Questions about the role of the faith community revealed that many of the individuals who supported Thandi were also Christians, but she did not seek support in the church. In chapter 6 more will be said about her and other participants' experiences of support from the faith community, or how the beliefs the faith community holds about people who have experienced trauma can contribute to its negative effects, rather than relieve it.

#### 4.16 How narrative practices can facilitate alternative ways of being in the world

In later conversations Thandi was really looking forward to visiting her family and was very excited at the prospect of seeing everyone at home. She wanted to continue *giving standing up to Evil Spirit and Negative Spiral her best shots and trusted that the Lord would stand with her against them, since she believed He also prefers open communication*. She was able to keep both Evil Spirit and Negative Spiral at bay in many instances and in fact, she noted a complete absence of Evil Spirit for most of her stay at home during the holidays. Communication between her and her mother was much better and her mother seemed to accept her desire to continue her education next year, although Thandi feared that she might change her mind. Career choices surrounding courses and bursaries troubled Thandi, but she said she would discuss it with the guidance counsellor. Thandi was delighted that her sister, who has a 10 year old child and has been jobless, seems to be taking responsibility for finding a job. Her brothers, who have both been to prison before, were also temporarily employed. Before this one of them regularly resorted to burglary. Alcohol still plays too much of a role in the family according to Thandi, but her brother (the one who assaulted her) said that he did not like its effects and felt trapped in the traditional drinking with friends at the weekend. We discussed possible conversations with him to address his concerns, but Thandi thought that all approaches would be interpreted as her *knowing better*.

#### 4.17 Pastoral narrative means to changing the meanings attached to traumatic experiences

Thandi's words bear witness to how the meanings attached to traumatic experiences have been changed through our conversations:

DAVID: What is happening at the moment in terms of some of these... life projects of yours?

CLIENT: *Progress. I'm going from worse to better. And I'm starting to see my life as something better, as something else. There is another meaning in my life now. You know I've always had dreams, but then I've always been this very pessimistic person, but now I am becoming more optimistic and even though it is quite hard to change, at least I've got some confidence... You know what I told you about knowing what I'm supposed to do, but I'm not doing it. Little by little I'm trying to do what I know I'm supposed to do.*

I asked questions about her previously expressed regret for not fighting back during the assault and we explored its effectiveness in making her brother stop. She realised that if she had fought back the beating would have been worse, but still felt that she betrayed that *tom-boy part of herself* that said she would *never let such a thing happen to her without fighting back*. These meanings however also changed when we deconstructed the discourses that informed them:

THANDI: Although I realise that if I had fought back I probably would have been beaten even more severely, ... I still feel that I betrayed that Tom-boy part of myself who said that I wouldn't let that happen.

ILSE: Is it true that you still sometimes feel like this?

CLIENT: *Well, that's how I felt at that stage, but now I see clearly that it's fine that I did that.*

ILSE: So is your premature wisdom now speaking stronger than self-blame?

CLIENT: Yes

#### 4.18 Definitional ceremony: Outsider witnesses

Myerhoff's idea of "definitional ceremonies" was developed by White (1997:93-114) to refer to a *structured forum which provides space for persons to engage in expressions of the stories of their lives and for the expression of the knowledges of life and skills of living that are associated with these stories*. Following the telling of these stories (stage 1), the outsider-witness group is invited to respond with a re-telling of the stories and of the knowledges and skills expressed (stage 2). In the third stage, the persons whose lives are at the centre of the ceremony have the opportunity to reflect on what they have heard in the re-telling. Every re-telling (also those taken back to people's lives after the ceremony) *exceeds the boundaries of the previous*, contributing further to the knowledges and skills of person's lives being thickly described.

After getting Thandi's permission I arranged a definitional ceremony in our last session before the winter holidays during which Thandi was going to spend a lot of time at home. The outsider witnesses were two psychologists who are experienced in Narrative therapy. They were not told anything about Thandi before hand, in line with only speaking about clients in their presence if possible (White 1998: Workshop). After introductions I explained the procedure to Thandi. In the first stage the two of us discussed our conversations so far and what had changed in her life over the past few weeks. We also discussed the guidance lesson which they had earlier that day which focused on trauma and its effects. Thandi said she withdrew from the discussion because it felt as if everybody knew what had happened to her and she did not want to *brag about it*. I wondered aloud if she would consider the way she has handled the trauma and its effects, as something to brag about. She introduced the idea of motivational speaking which she found quite attractive. This idea was mentioned again later after the outsider witnesses had mentioned Alison's book, *I have life - Alison's journey* (Thamm 1998). More about this later.

The outsider witnesses then reflected on what they had heard. One of their comments included that they thought of Thandi as a *pioneer - breaking new ground*. A pioneer needs *determination, but also tolerance and understanding* to succeed. Amongst other things they said it seemed as if she has to carry a *double burden* of not really fitting in her own community, nor at the school she was in. They also reflected on her *courage, premature wisdom and knowledge of herself and her family*.

Thandi got an opportunity to say with which of their reflections she connected and which she did not think fitted her. She was quite surprised by, but seemed to be taken up with the idea of being

seen as a pioneer. She connected to the idea of carrying a *double burden* too. One of the outsider witnesses could not help saying *I would like to say to Thandi: Go for it*, despite the knowledge that she should not be *cheer-leading*. Thandi found this very funny and commented on how strange it was to hear them speak about her, but not directly to her, as if it was blocked up between us and them. She thought *it was cool*. With this statement she reminded me to reflect on how she found the ceremony in general. She enjoyed it because she did not have to respond to them immediately, but had time to just listen. She said they introduced new ideas about herself, which she appreciated and which encouraged her. She found it amazing that the two outsider witnesses heard the same things while listening to her story, which in turn meant a lot to them - to have confidence in their listening skills. One also promised to keep Thandi's pioneer spirit alive in her own life. The following excerpts reflect something of her experience:

DAVID: You've had a witness team. Do you want to tell me a little more about the team?

CLIENT: *All right, the witness team. I thought it was a great experience to me. I liked seeing what other people think about what I've said and they actually came out with...made me realise more things about myself. You know, like having premature wisdom and being a pioneer. It was great for me. It was a very different experience and I was very nervous at first, people I didn't know and I didn't know what they were going to say about me, but it was quite surprising that they saw me as somehow how I saw myself before. But being a very pessimistic person, I changed and thought I'm probably not that type of person, but that gave me that optimistic side of myself. They told me some things that would help me along the line to solve problems.*

ILSE: What were the things that they said that stood out, that you hadn't thought about before?

CLIENT: *Premature wisdom and being a pioneer and that they feel that I've come from a very bad position to a better position and they feel like I fought a lot.*

ILSE: Is that something that is important to you?

CLIENT: *Yes, to know that I fought and I know where I'm going.*

ILSE: So maybe... remember you said to me at one stage that you thought that you didn't fight enough, but now you say that they saw that you did, in a different way?

CLIENT: *And they gave me credit for what I'd gone through, unlike other people. And it makes me wonder, although I know that there may be other things that are even harder to go through in life, but at least I've got the thought that I can fight it somewhere or other.*

ILSE: Has it given you the "great confidence" you want?

CLIENT: *Yes.*

Towards the end of the session we reflected on Thandi's *premature wisdom*: her knowledge that one has to allow time for changes that are really worthwhile, that people do not change overnight. She also has understanding for her mother's resistance to let go, especially since she will be the first child to leave home and since she is the youngest. One of the outsider witnesses mentioned the book *I have life - Alison's journey* (Thamm 1998) about Alison (a young woman who survived a rape and attempted murder) and that Thandi's words *making a life for myself and to get on with my*

life reminded her of Alison's life-affirming stance. Thandi joked about writing her own book about her story. She was invited to a talk by Alison in Somerset West which we attended together and we both found her story of survival moving and inspiring.

Once again a letter, which served to *rescue the said from the saying of it* (White 1998: Workshop), whilst also giving me the opportunity to check if I heard correctly and to ask questions which might lead to a richer description of the evolving counter plot, was written.

#### 4.18.1 Letter Four

*Dear Thandi (or should I say Zandi since you will be at home for the holidays?),*

*I really enjoyed the conversations we had with the outsider witnesses today. Thank you for being willing to take the risk of trying out something different and that you trusted me enough to allow me to bring along two strangers and a video camera! I appreciate this and the countless other learning opportunities our conversations have afforded me.*

*I am very interested to hear about your experience of having the outsider witnesses reflect on what they heard. What was the experience like? Which of the things that were said would you like to take with you into the future? Why?*

*Curiosity is getting the better of me again so I'm afraid you will have to put up with a few more specific questions too! Why do you think they saw you as a pioneer?*

*How much of this description fits for you and why?*

*What difference could seeing yourself as a pioneer make to your thoughts about your life now and your plans for the future?*

*You were described as someone with "premature wisdom" today. What did you think of this description? Why?*

*What influence could this knowledge about yourself have on dealing with Evil Spirit and Negative Spiral?*

*Would your dad have been surprised by this description? Why or why not?*

*Some other questions that spring to mind from what the witnesses said:*

*What makes it possible for you not to question your decisions despite discouragement from your family?*

*Can you name the spirit that keeps you going in the face of discouragement?*

*Elze speculated that it could be related to enjoying a challenge and being stubborn. Do you agree?*

*Would you like to add to these ideas?*

*They thought you had a strong "sense of knowing what is good for you" and that is why "you do not let pain and trauma take over". To them you seem to use "switching off" as a method of self-preservation. If this is so, how does it work for you?*

*They also thought that "Thandi knows her family well" and that is why you said you will not wait "until the fire burns too high". How do you think this knowledge can help you being with your family*

*in ways that you prefer?*

*You said I want to comment. I want to tell my mother 'I am not what you think'. What would you prefer your mother to think about you?*

*And how can you express who you are without back chatting?*

*Hope you will have a very enjoyable holiday and that you will score a few points in the contests against Evil Spirit and Negative Spiral. Please keep track of their tricks, but also of the ways you catch them out and keep them at bay.*

*May God's blessing and protection be with you. From Ilse*

#### **4.19 Audiences**

When Thandi phoned for an appointment once, she was very distressed about the sadness she was experiencing after watching a movie about death. She found it hard to speak on the phone, but said that she did not really understand her sadness, except that it was related to her father not being around now that she was receiving awards at school. When we met later that afternoon, she brought a friend along just to introduce her to me. When I asked Thandi if she would like her friend to join the session, she said she would be happy to have her present. I felt free to invite the friend, since narrative therapy stresses the importance of having an audience to changes and preferred identities.

Thandi was not distressed anymore and said having the friend to talk to was partially what calmed her down. She had also taken a walk to go and look for the rainbow that was spotted earlier by the school counsellor. I interviewed her about what it meant to her to have such a friend to talk to. She replied that she trusted this friend because *she listens, gives good advice and is honest*. She said that having her as a friend was an *inspiration and very motivating*, because *she works hard, is very disciplined and every one admires her*. Another thing that stood out for her was their shared faith - they were both Christians. This made it easier for them to talk to each other and to understand. It meant that they *liked talking about similar issues and noticed the same things*. Thandi could also ask her friend to pray for her, as she did earlier that week in connection with a letter she wrote to her mother. This friend actually also served as an inspiration to write the letter since she often wrote to her own mother. The discussions in the group (see Newsletter 3, Chapter 5) also encouraged her to write. Thandi said: *The letter was intended as a starter to the relationship I want us to have. I know that my mom loves me and she knows I love her, but I would like us to express it better, to come out straight. I want her to know that I know how she feels about my dad and that she can talk to me about it. I want to give her time and listen to her, and this is what I said in the letter too*. Upon reflection about her extreme sadness that morning Thandi said: *I am happy I felt so sad, because I think I can now understand my mom better*.

I also used the opportunity to interview the friend about why she did not shun Thandi when Thandi was very distressed and just ignored the friend's enquiry as to how she was. She said that she knew Thandi was not usually like that and she wanted to understand what was expected of her -

even if that was to give Thandi a *pause (space)*. This is why she wrote Thandi a letter to explain that she was concerned, but also hurt by her response of *shunning*. This in turn made Thandi realise that the friend really cared about her, and made her trust the friend even more. The friend introduced the concept of *complete forgiveness*, which she had asked her pastor to explain to her. We explored what this could imply and whether one could forgive a person and still be outraged about an action that they committed. Thandi said that it was all right for her to be outraged at what her brother had done, but she would like to be able to forgive him. She felt that he owed her an explanation though, but could not imagine speaking to him about it.

#### 4.20 Celebration, re-membering and re-telling

In line with the narrative practice of re-telling, Thandi was invited to participate in a group with 6 other girls who have had traumatic experiences such as child abuse, rape, family violence and alcohol or drug abuse in the family. More about this in the next chapter. One thing I would like to mention here is the counsellor's response to Thandi's interview in the second group meeting. She experienced it as a *celebration of the resistance Thandi had put up to trauma, Negative Spiral and Evil Spirit*. She found this resistance and the changes it seems to have brought to the way Thandi speaks about her experience *extraordinary*.

#### 4.21 Conclusion

In this chapter I described the process of co-constructing alternative, preferred ways of living after trauma with Thandi. It was illustrated how pastoral narrative maps guided the conversations we had and how these conversations opened up new possibilities for Thandi.

The possible implications that can be drawn from this description for practical theology and pastoral therapy are numerous. Some of these will be reflected on in chapter 6. I would like to end this chapter with the statement that a contextual approach to practical theology and a narrative approach to pastoral therapy could facilitate more sharing, and specifically about exciting things that bring *brightness* to people's lives. I will let Thandi's words explain this more fully:

CLIENT: *I find that I want to talk to you more. I get so excited if I learn something new, that I want to share it with you and stuff...*

ILSE: So it's not as if you have to talk to me about your problems, but about exciting things you've learnt?

CLIENT: *Yes. ...I would not have expected counselling would bring about the solutions we've brought up, this brightness and stuff. I am very much surprised by the brightness. It is amazing.*

## CHAPTER 5: "BEING RESILIENT": A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO GROUP WORK WITH YOUNG WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on an exploration of the use of pastoral narrative practices in a group set-up as a means of helping a group of teenage girls live in alternative, preferred ways after trauma. The narrative maps of audiences and re-telling, as well as the recommendation of the TRC for more community-based approaches to trauma counselling, which fits with the contextual approach to practical theology that I prefer, initiated the idea to start a group in the school that Thandi attends. The school counsellor was asked to invite a small group of girls who have previously discussed traumatic experiences with her and who could be interested in an exploration of their ability to "be resilient".

Sayger used a psycho-educational prevention model (1996:83) in working with multifamily groups. This allowed families to see that they were not alone in their struggle to thrive in challenging environments. It provided the opportunity to share experiences with others and it broke down some of the isolation and mistrust of professionals and the community in general. It helped members to develop initiatives for action to address their concerns and those of the community. Although it was not possible to physically include families in this group, family and community concerns were addressed. This chapter illustrates how narrative work could help people co-author preferred ways of being together and of being in the world.

### 5.2 Invitation to join the group

The following invitation was given to the prospective participants, including Thandi, outlining briefly what the narrative therapy group would be about. On the counsellor's request a few sample questions were included, to put the girls at ease about the types of questions that might be asked.

**Narrative therapy workshop:**

**by Ilse Appelt**

#### **Introduction**

*I am currently consulting people who are seen to be resilient or able to fight back against the effects of trauma and hardship in their lives. I am interested to learn more about the skills and knowledges that such people have, and how these are reflected in their values, hopes and dreams.*

*The counsellor, a friend of mine, said she knew of a few girls who might be willing to share their expertise in this regard with me and with the other girls in the group. I am very curious about how people manage to get through difficult times and what sustains them. I would therefore really appreciate your participation in the group and getting the opportunity of hearing your unique stories of resilience. With your consent (we will speak about this later) and after you have had the chance to read what I have written and to correct me if need be. I would also like to include what I have learnt from you (anonymously if you prefer) in my research study.*

*I am interested in getting rich descriptions of the skills and knowledges you have and this is why I believe sharing these descriptions in a group can be helpful. It will allow us the opportunity to reflect on what others have said and perhaps to take some of that back to our own lives.*

### **What is narrative therapy?**

*People using narrative ideas believe that we interpret our lived experience as stories. By doing so we select events from our lives and give preference and weight to certain events over others, thus forming our identities. Our dominant stories about ourselves could sometimes be filled with problems and they tend to exclude problem free, more preferred experiences of ourselves. Narrative therapy helps persons re-author their lives and uncover those neglected qualities, strengths, actions and thoughts, that lie in the shadow of the dominant story. It helps a person's hidden talents and resources, deprived of significance by problems, to blossom and come to light (Kecskemeti 1997:3).*

### **What kind of questions might be asked?**

*You will be "in control" of the questions asked in this group, in the sense that you will determine their content and you do not have to answer. If you prefer, you can participate in a reflecting capacity only, which means that I will ask you some questions about what you appreciated or if you connected with something the other girls have said. The counsellor asked me to include a few example questions. Hopefully this will get you interested and get you thinking until we meet. Please write down any ideas that come to mind. Thank you.*

### **Example questions:**

*If I asked your friends what they appreciated most about you, what might they say?*

*Would your family appreciate the same, or might they add something?*

*Which of the things they appreciate about you, do you value too?*

*Are there problems, relationships or experiences in your life that keep you back from living in ways that you prefer? If yes, what name would you give to these problems?*

*What pictures of yourself do these problems give you?*

*How do you feel about the pictures problems draw of you? And why do you feel that way?*

*What was the last occasion where the problem's picture of you did not fit?*

*Imagine a miracle happened and you woke up tomorrow and found that the problem has left for good. What other pictures of yourself could you then see?*

*Whose voices stand with this picture of yourself? Who shares this picture of you?*

*Which picture do you prefer? Why?*

*PS: These are just a few of the types of questions that could be asked. Other questions will focus on the skills and knowledges you have gained in standing up to the effects of trauma; the history of these skills and knowledges; and who or what assisted you in maintaining them. But you will be co-creating the questions, so I look forward to meeting you and getting ideas from you.*

### 5.3 Getting to know about each other

After a brief introduction of each participant and of myself and the studies I am involved in, they were asked to think about how we were going to talk together and about any guidelines they wanted us to adopt. Confidentiality within the group was important to all, as well as the right not to answer all questions. In response to a concern expressed they agreed not to treat each other differently if they met outside the group. I explained that their ideas fitted well with the narrative practices that I hoped to practise in the group: *practices of respect*, of *positioning myself to the people that I meet*; of *enrolling people in their own knowledges*; of *communities of concern*; of *honouring people*; of *celebration and joy*, and of *alternative histories* (Epston 1999: Workshop).

In accordance with a pastoral narrative approach the aim of the first session was to get to know the participants apart from their problems (Freedman, Epson & Lobovits 1997:34). The counsellor was thus interviewed about the skills and knowledges reflecting resilience that she has been an audience to. Questions about what she had grown to appreciate about the participants generated descriptions of them apart from the effects of trauma. These descriptions could lay the foundation for participants to feel respected and to learn to respect themselves (Freedman, Epson & Lobovits 1997:35). Notes about their competencies were taken and written on large sheets of paper, visible to all. They were then invited to reflect on what had been said, to add to the notes or to provide examples of how they have also been witness to some of the skills and knowledges described. Finally the participant in question was given an opportunity to reflect on which of the skills listed she was surprised about and which not, as well as which ones she deemed important in her ability to cope in difficult situations. Reflections about skills she might want to develop more were also asked. In addition to this each participant was given some feedback questions at the end of each session for their reflections both on the process and on what they have learnt (two examples are included in Appendix 2). I was given permission to write about the process. This could be linked to the observations of Freedman and Combs (1996:237):

*Although the dominant culture of therapy tends to be a secret enterprise, in the narrative subculture people who consult with us are usually enthusiastic about the idea of letting other people in on the process. We think that externalising and antipathologizing practices offer people a different kind of experience in therapy. When therapy becomes a context in which people constitute preferred selves, they have nothing to hide, and much to show.*

Since I wanted to use the opportunity to *rescue the said from the saying of it* (White 1998: Workshop) and to co-create documents that could be circulated amongst participants and edited by them, I was given permission to write a newsletter about each of our group sessions. I chose a newsletter format instead of a letter, to have an open document to all participants (also those who might have excused themselves). It also reflected the "newsworthiness" of what was said within the group. As mentioned before, some reflection questions which I might have included in a letter if I had chosen that format were also handed out at the end of each meeting. The skills and knowledges described were thus written up in the first newsletter and handed to the participants in the following meeting. By structuring this chapter around these newsletters the voices of the co-researching participants will be privileged.

## “Being Resilient” Newsletter nr.1

### Skills, knowledges and strengths appreciated and witnessed in participants:

#### Camille

The school counsellor, who is also Camille's hockey coach, has witnessed her as a *lively, shining and fun person*. Other participants added that she can be *humorous* and has the ability to *lift the spirits of others*. One participant appreciated clearly hearing Camille and her friends' laughs as they walk down the school corridors.

Camille was however also described as someone who has the ability to *think about things and to be serious* when the situation warrants it. The counsellor witnessed her *dedication, hard work and determination* too, at school and on the hockey field. Being described as someone who works hard somewhat surprised Camille, but she knew she is a determined person, and thought that this has helped her most in difficult times.

Further reflections revealed that she is seen as someone with knowledge of what her goals are. She was described as *very intense* sometimes, and someone who is *positive and has dreams that she follows*.

#### Somikazi

The counsellor appreciated the skill Somikazi has in *not complaining and making the best of things*. She could also bear witness to her skill in *caring for her little brother*. This led her to describe Somikazi as a *mature* young woman, who is *unselfish* and seems to *value giving to others*. She was seen as *forgiving and understanding*. Although Somikazi was experienced as quite *shy and serious*, the counsellor loved her *beautiful smile*, and continues to appreciate it every time it appears!

The counsellor thought that the fact that Somikazi took the step to come and speak to her, spoke of her as a *courageous and brave person*. Other participants agreed that they also saw this in her, and in themselves too. Taking that first step took a lot of *guts*. Somikazi's story and the way she lived her life showed that she was a *very strong person*. Somikazi agreed with this description, and further questions revealed that she saw her friends as part of her strength. Her skill at *being a good friend* was witnessed too.

One of Somikazi's skills remained hidden for quite a while, and the counsellor was delighted when she first saw it: Somikazi's *fun side* seems to get a lot of expression in dancing, which she does very well.

### Thandi

Since Ilse had many conversations with Thandi, the counsellor wanted to know what she had grown to appreciate about her. Ilse had the privilege to be a witness of amongst other things Thandi's *determination, patience and willingness to work hard* towards changing things in her life. This required *bravery and courage* on her part, since her speaking out against the effects of trauma in her life, meant going against her family tradition of keeping things secret. That is why the skilful way in which she is a *pioneer* in her family, which is really not easy, is appreciated. Her (*premature*) *wisdom*, which is revealed in how understanding she can be of others, like her mother, and also the wise way in which she looks at experiences in her life, was also noticed.

Her skill at *caring for others*, especially her family, also became clear. Testimony can be given to her *resistance to things which keep her back* from being with her family in ways that she prefers. These preferred ways involve being able to share what you feel and think, and also to show how much you care. Thandi can be described as a *giving person*, who strives to be *open* about things. She has also gained a lot of knowledge about *being positive*. She was described by others as *a thinker and as aware*, and I have witnessed her growing awareness of what to look out for to avoid falling into the traps Negative Spiral sometimes sets.

Other participants thought the fact that she was chosen as a prefect spoke of her as someone with *strong leadership qualities*, and she was *especially good at tolerating a lot*, being *flexible and being able to relate* to different people. She is knowledgeable about *goal setting*, and her *planning* for her future bears witness of this. The last thing the participants mentioned was her *skill at being fun*. Ilse has enjoyed witnessing this skill and has grown to appreciate the nuances of *humour* Thandi brought into their conversations.

### The school counsellor

The participants spontaneously reflected that the school counsellor made the bold step of speaking to someone much easier. Ilse was very interested to hear more about what contributed to this. They thought her *skill in not judging people and being trustworthy* was very significant. That she was experienced as a nice person generally was also something they all noted. One participant said the counsellor knew how to make her feel that *she will find time* to be with her and that *she understands more than others*. Another participant described her as *very courageous*.

### Robin

Although the counsellor only had one conversation with Robin, she also got to know her as a *survivor* through the social worker. Her story was one that bore witness to her as a *fighter*. She was described as *very strong and independent*. Robin agreed that she enjoys being different and expressing things differently. I wondered if this testified to the fact that she was *creative*, and she and the other participants agreed on this.

Robin was also seen to *value freedom*. She was described as *intense and passionate*, and she reflected that this could be because *she stands up for what she believes in*. She values *honesty and openness*, and tries to be *open* about herself, even though this makes her feel vulnerable sometimes. She also said that she *does not trust easily* and she *does not like being judged*.

One participant witnessed Robin's being *understanding and helpful* on various occasions when they were still in hostel together. The counsellor thought that Robin was also a pioneer in her family. Robin reflected that her *family was very important to her* and that she looks up to her mom. She saw her ability to be *truthful and loving* as the skills that have helped her most in difficult times and hoped to build on them. She also enjoyed *being in touch with nature* at those times. Robin's *fun side* was also mentioned.

### Blanca

Being skilled at *having dreams and believing* in things were what the counsellor noticed about Blanca. She experienced Blanca as *having a strong fire and spark*, that could be connected to a *sense of hope*. The others thought she has a *good sense of humour* and her smiles shows that she *does not let things get her down*. The counsellor could bear witness to the fact that she *sees the best in others and is forgiving*. Blanca added that she tries *not to judge* people on first impressions, but gives them a chance. She said it was important to her not to judge others and *not to jump to conclusions*.

The counsellor saw her as an *ambitious person*, who wants things to be better. She was described as being *willing to learn and willing to teach*. One participant added that this was her experience too and that they learnt from each other. She added that she saw Blanca as someone who *valued honesty*, she is someone who *does not pretend* and who does not put up defences. She thought that this showed that Blanca was *willing to be vulnerable*, which takes courage and guts, since it involves *trust*, which Blanca is able to have in others. The counsellor concluded that she experienced Blanca as someone who could make a comeback, someone who *picks herself up* when things are tough. When asked to reflect on this Blanca added that this skill was linked to people in her life who have hope and who believe in her.

### Sipho

The counsellor's first introduction to Sipho was during a T-shirt race at the school swimming gala. She was struck by Sipho's *courage*, her ability *not to care that people were looking* and the way she responded to the fact that her team needed her. Since then she has had many opportunities witnessing Sipho's *enthusiastic* participation in sport, especially netball and cricket. The way she participated also revealed that she can be *passionate about things*. The counsellor could also give testimony that Sipho is not only passionate on the sports field, but also in *standing up for what she believes in*. (Sipho was quite surprised that she had this skill). She is not scared to stand up for what she believes in, even if it goes against what others might think. This is also why she described her as a *very strong person*, who doesn't let things get her down. She had an appreciation for the fact that Sipho is able to remain positive about things, and doesn't get depressed - she is *able to get on top of things*. Another skill appreciated in Sipho is her ability to *care* for other people.

The counsellor had been a witness to Sipho's *sense of humour*, *her willingness to learn and to try*, and *how involved she gets in things*. One participant added that she experienced Sipho as a very lively person, who *loves laughing*. This makes the other girls always to listen to her, since she is very loud, but in a good way. Sipho added that she actually likes attention. She thought that her ability to *be positive and her willingness to try* were skills that might be helpful in the future.

### Nozu

The counsellor had grown to appreciate Nozu's ability to *work at problems* and how quietly *strong* she seemed. What also struck her was how very *considerate* Nozu is of others, since she does not want to hurt others. This led her to describe Nozu as someone with the skill of *caring* and the knowledge of how to feel a lot for others. Nozu gave the counsellor the impression that people are important in her life. The counsellor became aware of how important it is for her to *talk* about things, even though she sometimes keeps things inside. She is *open and honest* as long as it does not hurt others. Other participants knew that Nozu loves being with friends and her boyfriend. They thought that could be something that sustains her and that she was *very brave in not pretending*.

The counsellor has witnessed Nozu's skill in learning to *look after herself* and doing things on her own. She saw Nozu as mature for these reasons. Finally, the counsellor could not resist mentioning that she also appreciated seeing Nozu's *beautiful smile*. Nozu added that she was very shy, but could also be very *short tempered* at home with her two little brothers (but not at school). She also said that she *loves music*. She told us about a time when she was sensitive to an old, poor man and showed him some kindness, which led him to say: *I thank God that He created you*. Nozu reflected that her *relationship with God* has supported her very much.

## 5.5 Learning from each other: Consulting your consultants

With the narrative practices of enrolling people in their own knowledges, creating communities of concern, and celebration and joy in mind, I asked Thandi if she would be willing to act as co-therapist in the second meeting. I share the sentiments of Freedman, Epston and Lobovits (1997:127):

*It is hard to miss the delight that children take in the chance to "show and tell" their knowledge and skills to others. Perhaps even more important is the fact that in sharing their experiences young persons have the altruistic satisfaction of making contributions to others.*

I used the process of interviewing her about the effects of trauma in her life, and how she has reclaimed her life from these effects in a twofold manner. She could speak out and describe her skills more richly, and other participants were given the opportunity to reflect on what she has said. This process allowed her to assume the unconventional role of being consulted as an authority on her own life; of experiencing her pre-existing and newly acquired knowledges and abilities deemed as effective and worthy of respect; and of seeing that her ideas are considered significant enough to be documented and circulated to others (Freedman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:126-127).

The second group session was guided by a "rite of passage" metaphor, as described by White and Epston (1992:280), since Thandi was encouraged to:

*...negotiate the passage from novice to veteran, from client to consultant. Rather than instituting a dependency on the "expert knowledge" presented by the therapist and other authorities, this therapy enables persons to arrive at a point where they can take recourse to liberating alternative and "special" knowledges that they have resurrected and/or generated during therapy.*

These aspects of a narrative approach to pastoral therapy highlights the ways in which it allows the inherent power difference in therapy to be deconstructed and addressed to a certain extent. It also makes it clear why a kerygmatic approach was not preferred, since preaching by the therapist could silence the "expert knowledge" the client(s) have, also in terms of their experience of God.

Newsletter 2 which follows describes how this "rite of passage" for Thandi also benefited other group members. The section *Reflections about Thandi's expertise by the group* illustrates how *consulting your consultants* can open up new possibilities for others, whilst at the same time consolidating the new, preferred identity of the consultant.

As mentioned in Newsletter 2, I had one-to-one conversations with one of the group members. She was so touched by what Thandi had shared and by the fact that trauma had at times taken away her own desire to live, that she could not speak in the group. She did however indicate that she would like to speak to me alone afterwards, and the group respected this wish. We spoke about the effects of trauma in her life and elaborated on ways in which she is resisting these effects. Her relationship with God, which she found sustaining, was more richly described when I remembered the old man's words *I thank God that He created you* from the previous session. Reflection about the role of her faith and the faith community will follow at the end of this chapter.

## **“Being resilient” newsletter nr.2**

### **Insider expertise on the effects of trauma in Thandi’s life and how she has fought back**

#### **Speaking out despite family secrets**

The group was privileged to have a participant who was willing to act as co-therapist and consultant. Her willingness to speak out about the effects of trauma in her life was especially appreciated by me, the facilitator, since it showed me that Thandi was living up to her reputation for working hard, in this case at the "life project" of speaking out despite family secrets.

#### **The effects of trauma**

Thandi was interviewed and the questions initially focused on the effects of trauma in her life. Thandi shared with the group how trauma had increased negative thoughts in her life and how this led to Negative Spiral taking over. The effects of trauma were widespread and she said this interfered in *how I dealt with others; my thoughts, my schoolwork, my sport (I thought it was the end), my emotions, my feelings - it made me feel I could not cope anymore*. She also told us how trauma had increased the influence of Negative Spiral and Evil Spirit in her life. It was explained that Evil Spirit used to just take over when she went home, and destroyed all her good intentions of communicating with her family.

#### **Reclaiming her life from the effects of trauma**

Thandi could, however, also testify about the extent to which she has been able to reclaim her life from Negative Spiral and Evil Spirit. She found that once she had named them, she was more aware of their tricks and could predict them. She was also able to stand up to Evil Spirit's tricks and identify what it was that she preferred, namely *understanding how others felt, relating to each other and communicating with less misunderstandings*. Having Evil Spirit in control was *normal* before our conversations *but now it does not belong there*.

This new skill made her feel as long as *I know how to fight it (Negative Spiral), it's fine. I don't think it will ever completely end, but I've got a protective shield*. When asked about this shield, she said it is *the positive things I know about myself*. These included *being determined, working hard, being brave* and being able to *take risks*. Working hard was a skill that helped her work hard at thinking about her life and the questions: *What is it that I want in my life? And what is it that I want for my family?*

### **Thandi's reflections about what was helpful**

Thandi reflected as follows: *The experiences I had, including negative things, taught me about what I prefer.* She found *speaking about it and also writing things down* helpful in this process. Another thing that was very helpful was *how others believed in me.* Upon questioning her, it became known that even people who are not with her physically anymore, like her dad, can be helpful now. She said: *He saw me as someone with abilities. Remembering what they (important people) expected and what they taught me* were also things that helped Thandi stand up against the effects of trauma.

### **Reflections by the group about Thandi's expertise**

The group members were struck by a variety of things in what Thandi had said. One of them was made more aware of her own lack of awareness of the effect of certain problems in her life, and thought the idea of naming them could help her in actually doing something about it. Another member was struck by Thandi's ability to take risks. She realised that although she was willing to take risks in certain areas of her life, such as sport (*I hit the ball so that I can be proud of myself*, even if the opponent is intimidating), she was perhaps not taking risks in other areas of her life.

Many participants were fascinated by the idea of having a protective shield, and some could identify aspects of their own protective shields. Others thought they did not really have protective shields yet, and this made it hard to go on with life. Thandi later reflected that there had also been times when she found it *hard to go on with life* and trauma convinced her that she *just wished she could go away* or not be. But now she realised that *You can't bring a knife if you are fighting a monster, you need something bigger.* She said you must *know your enemy*, and since she has been able to name hers, she could develop an appropriate protective shield. This knowledge has also made her aware that *you can't change the whole world, but one thing at a time* was not impossible.

The fact the one participant could see how she *handled things in a different way* to Thandi, made her feel *I know myself better.* On the whole, the participants appreciated the opportunity of listening to and consulting Thandi. One was so touched by the similarities of the effects of trauma in her own life, that she found it impossible to talk right then. She did however share that trauma also took away her desire to live, but the realisation that others needed her, kept her going. I spoke to her alone after the group session.

## 5.7 Deciding on topics, the first of which happened to be relationships with mothers

The invitation to the group (see section 5.2) introduced participants to the reason for their selection - that they are seen as resilient by their school counsellor. The first session was in a sense a broader description by the counsellor as to why she saw them as such. Initially I thought that the group should decide on a name, to be used for the group newsletter, early on and planned to do so in the second or third meeting. In the meanwhile the group said that they liked the title "Being resilient" that I had given to the first newsletter and they wanted me to continue using it. The planned naming of the group actually got put off until the final session, when participants were asked to reflect on their experience of being in the group. Although they were pleased with the newsletter title, a few other names related to the ideas of hope and bringing light to others (for example "The matchboxes") were suggested. I asked for a name in Xhosa, which is the mother tongue of most of the participants and everyone liked the name suggested: *Oonomathemba*, which means *the hopes*. It was used in Newsletter 5.

I thought the concept of being on a journey and questions asked by McPhie and Chaffey (1998:7) could be helpful to the group, but it was important to me that the image should fit for them, and not be my idea imposed on them. I also thought the metaphor of a journey could fit with some of the ideas of different pictures of oneself introduced in the example questions initially. I thus proposed an introduction of this idea to the group, but asked about any other possibilities they would like to put on the table.

Fortunately a narrative approach puts the client(s) at the centre, and allowed me to let the group determine what would be discussed first. Since a few of the group members excused themselves due to an important examination the next day, the group was quite small that day and everyone seemed particularly interested in talking about their relationships with their mothers. All the girls present found their relationships with their mothers painful: one had been and one still is being physically abused by her mother. The introduction of the concept of a journey was left until the end of the session, since all wanted to talk about their relationships with their mothers. A description of some of what was said in this group meeting follows in Newsletter 3.

## **“Being Resilient” Newsletter nr.3**

### **Reflections about relationships with mothers**

#### **A letter from a mother shared with all**

Nozu shared a letter she received from her mother with the rest of the group by asking Thandi to read it. It contained a message of appreciation for her understanding and of how much her mother loved her and missed her. This letter and previous card was in response to a card Nozu had hidden in her mother's luggage (her mother recently left to work abroad for a year) as a surprise. Nozu thought it was like the card stared at her (mom) and reminded her of Nozu's love. Nozu also said *"previously I was really lonely and needed my mother, but couldn't tell her that I loved her because abuse and violence stood in the way"*. Thandi reflected that she also wanted to write a letter to her mom, although she thought it could be though.

#### **Some of the questions asked about Nozu's relationship with her mother**

Was your mother's letter to you a surprise? Why? Which parts of it did not surprise you?  
How come your relationship with your mother changed?  
If it is okay with you, could you tell us a bit more how difficult your relationship used to be?  
What brought an end to violence and abuse?  
Would you say that your mother now appreciates the fact that you were able to stand up to her abuse and question her about it?  
What does the calm way in which you discussed your outrage about abuse with your mom say about your skill of handling people?  
What does the fact that you could speak to your mom despite Fear say about you? What special skills do you have that helped you speak out despite Fear?  
Did writing a letter make it easier to share some of your feelings? How come?

#### **A different picture of what parenting can be about**

When asked how she got a different picture of parenting and speaking about differences rather than resorting to violence, Nozu replied: *My father always said that every person has an understanding heart. There will be a time when they will understand.* She believed these words could also be true about the mothers of other participants who do not seem to believe it themselves. Siphosaid: *My mom doesn't get that we do not live in the same world; she grew up in a different world. She just had to live by rules; girls just had to clean the house and never speak. But I have rights too.* She was very sad about the pain that abuse is causing at her home. Thandi understood Siphos dilemma and agreed with Nozu that talking might help. All agreed safety was important and we couldn't decide for others.

### A culture of abuse?

When we reflected on what had been said we realised that the different world of attending a "white" school and the stigma of being *too Westernised* attached to it, was something that Xhosa mothers sometimes used against daughters when they disagreed about things. Participants agreed that it was not fair that girls were often not treated equally with boys (in fact, *boys can never do anything wrong*) and children were often not allowed to defend themselves. All group members agreed that beating is not a Xhosa tradition, although perpetrators sometimes say it is, since they know of people (like the fathers of two of the participants) who stood for and were examples of *understanding and caring* parenting. Siphos uncle for example was understanding and able to adapt to changes.

### Questions we could discuss next week

*How can life be like a journey?*

*If you had to describe your journey after trauma or problematic experiences:*

*What would you call the starting place? What was it like?*

*What would you call this place where you are now?*

*Where is this journey taking you? Where would you prefer to be?*

*What will be different about your life?*

*How will you get from where you are to where you want to be?*

*What personal strengths will help you to keep moving forward?*

*What might get in your way?*

*What is it about you that will help you get around these obstacles?*

*Having glimpsed what's at the end of the tunnel, how might this group help you keep moving towards this?*

#### 5.8.1 Something to think about till next week

Instead of introducing the concept of a journey at the beginning of the third meeting, it was done at the end. I hoped that it could invoke a sense of movement and possibility, even if it is at times difficult. It was also hoped that the image would give the group a clearer view about what stood in their way. After an introduction to the journey concept and looking at an example of a map drawn of the journey as seen by the facilitators of a group of young women who had been sexually abused (McPhie & Chaffey 1998:7), the group was invited to reflect on the questions at the end of Newsletter 3 at home, and to bring along ideas for the next meeting. They were also invited to draw maps of their journeys.

At the end of each meeting the questions for reflection at home focused mostly on the process and reflections of that particular meeting. Examples of the kinds of questions they were asked to think about at home are included in Appendix 2. Answers to the first set of questions (about what the counsellor appreciated) included: *It made me feel proud of things that I can do and also made me realise that I can do things that people find very interesting; and it was amazing*

*because she revealed things that I never knew about myself. A reflection about experiences in the group included: Firstly I was scared of this whole group thing, but when I went to it then I realised that many had the same problems that I had and were helping me and I was helping them. What someone found most surprising was the way you asked the questions.*

The group agreed that topics which they felt were relevant had to be included. Although I did not have much detail about the background of each participant, my individual work, as well as reading about other groups, especially that of McPhie and Chaffey (1998:6), led me to suggest a few possible topics, while leaving room for participants to add and choose which ones they preferred. My suggestions included fear, secrecy around problems such as abuse and violence, and critical voices of self-blame and self-doubt.

### **5.9 Reflecting on the journey of recovery after trauma and exposing secrets**

Thandi volunteered a description of her map of the journey she had undertaken and the map she was still travelling at the start of the next session (see Newsletter 4 for a description). The other participants found her map very interesting and reflected on how it was similar or different to theirs.

Everyone agreed that secrets used to keep them from moving forward and with the group's consent we proceeded to explore different kinds of secrets and whom they benefit. Questions similar to those used by McPhie and Chaffey (1998:16-17) were asked:

*Are there different kinds of secrets? How do they differ?*

*How do families and society encourage secrecy, especially in children?*

*How does society / families react to anyone who doesn't play the secrecy game?*

*Who benefits from secrecy?*

*Have there been times when secrecy has burdened your life? What habits has secrecy recruited you into?*

*Who has encouraged secrecy in your life and how? Has anyone isolated you or set you up so that you feel unable to talk to those closest to you?*

*What fears support secrecy?*

*Think of a time when secrecy didn't steal your voice or strangle your vocal chords. What does it tell you about yourself that you stood up to secrecy despite the deception of others and your training in secrecy and self-doubt?*

*What one thing would be different about how you treat yourself or think about yourself if you weren't weighed down by the burden of secrecy?*

## **“Being resilient” Newsletter nr.4**

### **Getting unstuck from trauma's mud and problematic experiences**

#### **An athletic young woman's escape from being stuck in the middle of a pool of mud**

Thandi described the map of “life after trauma as a journey”, which started with herself being *stuck in the middle of a pool of mud*. She placed herself in the middle of the pool because she *did not know which side to go to*. It was very *difficult to move* because *the mud was like quick sand* – the more she tried to pull out, the deeper she sank. So it was very *hard to move out*.

The map then had some footprints leading to the next picture. She was still stuck in the mud, but now saw the sun on one side and a dark cloud which obscured the sun on the other side - representing the hope radiating from the possibility of speaking to the school counsellor, partially blocked out by the heavy cloud if things at home. A long trail of footprints lead to the sunny side.

Eventually she reached the sunny side (spoke to the counsellor) but the map shows her curled up in a ball: *I was closing and shutting myself off from the world. I was afraid everyone could see what had happened to me*. It took many more difficult footprints in sessions with me until the journey brought her to a place on the map where there were two faces – *a frowning face* which changed to *a happy face*. Now there are three faces: The first one still smiling, which is Thandi with the knowledge that things are getting better. The second a frowning face, for those in between times when things in her life still make her sad when they interfere with the dreams she has for her family and for her future. The third and current face is connected to her sharing her journey with the group in the second meeting. It is a *surprised/shocked face*, amazed at realising: *I've got here; I've come so far*.

#### **What made the mud thicker and like quick sand?**

Everyone agreed that secrets and fear make the mud even thicker. Although there were other matters too, we would focus on secrets first.

#### **Which fears stood with keeping secrets?**

*I don't want to hurt others. I want to protect them. But they hurt me. In keeping secrets to try to protect others I ended up with barriers between myself and them*. A related viewpoint was that it was also important to *stand up* for oneself and this might enable us to mean more to others in the long run.

### **Which secrets are like barriers between people?**

Everyone agreed that it was not fun secrets like surprises that divided people, but rather those kinds of secrets that betray closeness that made the mud thicker. We discussed how society encouraged secrets - by making children blame themselves for things that happened to them, by letting them feel *disgraced and ashamed and guilty*. The community also often treats people who reveal secrets about what others had done to them as *outcasts* and makes them *victims again by discriminating against them*. This is why secrets stole our voices and made us think – *what are others going to think?* But these thoughts and myths obscure the fact that *you've got to do things for yourself*. Participants agreed: the only one who really benefits from a secret is the perpetrator, *you yourself don't benefit*.

### **What about you enabled you to stand up to secrecy?**

Thandi said that standing up to secrecy was like *the main stage of an obstacle course*. What helped her to do it was that she *really wanted to get out of the mud*. She was also able to take the advice that she had heard from others, and found that speaking out could be a bridge across the mud. Another bridge was Hope, although the mud was quite good at obscuring Hope. To her surprise she also found that taking little steps at first enabled her to eventually make a big move.

Sipho said that it was as if the power of secrecy kept the realisation that *secrecy was hurting herself, not others* from her. She had to see this first. Her choice to go against secrecy stood with her *choice for life and to live for the future*. She realised that by speaking out about secrets she was much *more able to forget* about the past. She does not think about the bad things in the past so much any more, whereas before it was *like a heavy backpack* that weighed her down.

Camille said that for her to stand up against secrecy was *a very big step*, especially since it involved *trust* in others. This was a big step away from *being crushed by the weight on her shoulders*. It was also a move away from saying *"I'm fine"* when she was not and twisting the truth. It was *a step towards a new beginning*. This new beginning moved *the lonely, dark pathway* she was on *into the distance* and put her on *a pathway lit by a shining light* where she is going *with friends and maybe family towards the future*. With this big step of throwing off the burden of secrecy her whole body *now feels lighter* and she *can breathe more easily*.

### **What effects can speaking out and standing up to secrecy have?**

We spoke about the effects people's speaking out and standing up to secrecy (like Alison in her book "I have life"). People who speak out about trauma such as rape *help to break the stigma and myths* that exist in society, showing that they are not damaged forever.

### 5.11 Circulating the new story and “re-membering” the group while saying goodbye

The narrative map of audiences is especially significant if one prefers a social construction view of reality. Accordingly, new identities need to be performed, circulated and co-constructed by others so as to become real. Although participants were afforded opportunities to solidify and circulate new stories about themselves by serving as consultants to others in the group, it is also important that their new identities should be circulated outside the group (Adams-Westcott & Isenbart 1990:57).

For these reasons we explored how participants could let others *know where they are*. Questions that were reflected on included:

*What are some of the stories you have heard over and over about yourself, or that you used to tell yourself about who you were?*

*Do these stories fit with what you have learnt about yourself in the group?*

*Who might still think you are like they/you thought you were?*

*What would you like to say to people who have an out-of-date story of who you are?*

In an attempt to give participants an opportunity to “re-member” the voices of the group and to discuss their fears about continuing on their journeys without the group, the following questions were reflected on (McPhie & Chaffey 1998:26-30):

*Could what you have learnt in the group make getting others up-to-date easier? How?*

*What are your fears about continuing your journey and being without the group?*

*What are you taking away from the group that will help you stand up to those fears?*

*What has the group given you that you would like them to know you are taking with you?*

The metaphor of a path was included in the metaphor of a journey. According to Adams-Westcott and Isenbart (1990:49) this metaphor *helps people in understanding the evolutionary nature of change and identifying resources available to negotiate transitions*. These ideas were continually brought back into reflections, for example when participants were invited to think about the obstacles they have overcome and what this said about them, and also about the obstacles that might lie ahead. Adams-Westcott and Isenbart (1990:50) continue: *This ritual serves to create a view of change as fluid and ongoing. It also helps clients begin to identify the resources that have prepared them for change. Through the identification of obstacles, the ritual concretises the restraints which have contributed to the maintenance of the problem. The view of the future with many potential directions punctuate the notion of choice*. Newsletter 5, which follows, shows how relevant these ideas were to the group.

**Oonomathemba (Our hopes)**  
**“Being resilient” Newsletter** nr.5

**Letting others know how our stories have changed**

**Blanca** said that she would like to let her friends know that they have an out-of-date story of her. They still think *she is a druggie and we can't be friends with her*. She would like to tell them *I am not like that. I can listen to others' stories and give advice. I can be trusted as a friend*. She thought that if they knew about the new story that she knew was true, things would be different. Although it would not be easy to talk to them, Blanca thought that she would be able to do it and we discussed the possibility of arranging a party to introduce the friends (who in fact all brought her to the counsellor in the first place) to the Blanca she wants them to see.

**Sipho** said that something she learnt about herself since she joined the group was that she *never cared about anything* and (pretended) to be *too happy*. She *never had any time for her mother* and only wanted to have fun with her friends. She realised that she does care and this has led to a change in the communication between her and her mother. When she thinks of the path she is on, she sometimes sees *a dark alley in the future*. However, she also knows: *I have taken a big step, in a different direction..* This big step has brought her closer to her mom and to her friends, and she is now asked for advice and support by friends like Nicky. Sipho also realised that she has hope for the future, because when she was sick, she thought: *I am not ready to die*, there are things to live for.

**Somikazi** said that the changes in her life will enable her to spend more time with her friends and with books. She said she knew her friends would be happy about this because *maybe I am a nice person and I make them laugh. They like spending time with me*. Other things she thought would change was that she would be happier, less stressed and less short tempered.

**Thandi** said: *I was always pretending. I was the one telling stories to myself* (that were not true). Her family did therefor not know that she was *stuck in the mud*. Thandi thought that *it could be helpful for her family to find out* that she was stuck, since most of them also seem stuck, and hearing about how she managed to get out of the mud *could give them hope*. She said: *In this way I could bring light in their lives*. She also said that *before you can start a fire you need a match*, and this is why she has taken the first steps in being more open with her mother.

### **What difference has being in the group made?**

Camille said: *My trust in people has come back since I have joined the group. She also found: now I can express how I am feeling and this has helped me even in my schoolwork, like in English. In other areas I now know how people react and control their emotions. Everyone agreed that it was nice just sitting and listening at times. It was also good that we did not have to give details. We also realised that helping people is not just saying "don't worry" – you have to learn to be straightforward but tactful.*

Sipho said that initially she was afraid that the group might consist of a lot of weird people asking weird questions and she would be waiting for the time to go by, but found the group interesting and found herself able to talk more. She felt better because she was able to talk and others understood her. The other girls agreed that it was good to have a chance to express themselves and hear that others related to and understood their experiences.

Thandi appreciated knowing and hearing that her talking to others was of benefit to them.

### **Fears around continuing our journeys and being without the group**

*Thinking it's too big a step or it's too difficult* were thoughts all agreed could create fear in the future. It could also lead to the temptation to turn back. The counsellor shared that she also had these thoughts at times, but her *dream of exploring, being different and making her own life* kept her from turning back.

*Not having people to share my experiences with* was also a fear that could stand in the way of continuing on the path or journey participants preferred to be on. Another fear was *looking back more than I want to*, which could make one forget *I am happy to be who I am*.

### **Things that we are taking away from the group that will help us stand up to our fears**

Some of the knowledges we are taking with us include:

*People have fears and problems, but we can stand up to them.*

*I used to feel "I am the only one" but now I know I am not the only person with problems.*

*I always wanted to be someone else, but not anymore.*

*I know what my skills are.*

*I have realised that I can help others and talk to them. They might have been where I was.*

*I have to care for myself before I can care for others.*

*I should give myself time and use all my skills to help myself.*

*I love helping other people. I should not take the easy way out.*

*What I experienced in the group might make talking to others easier.*

*I've learnt how to talk things through. I've seen how others cope who go through hard times.*

*I know that there are parts that have changed. I am a happy person inside.*

*If I want happiness for all, I should include myself.*

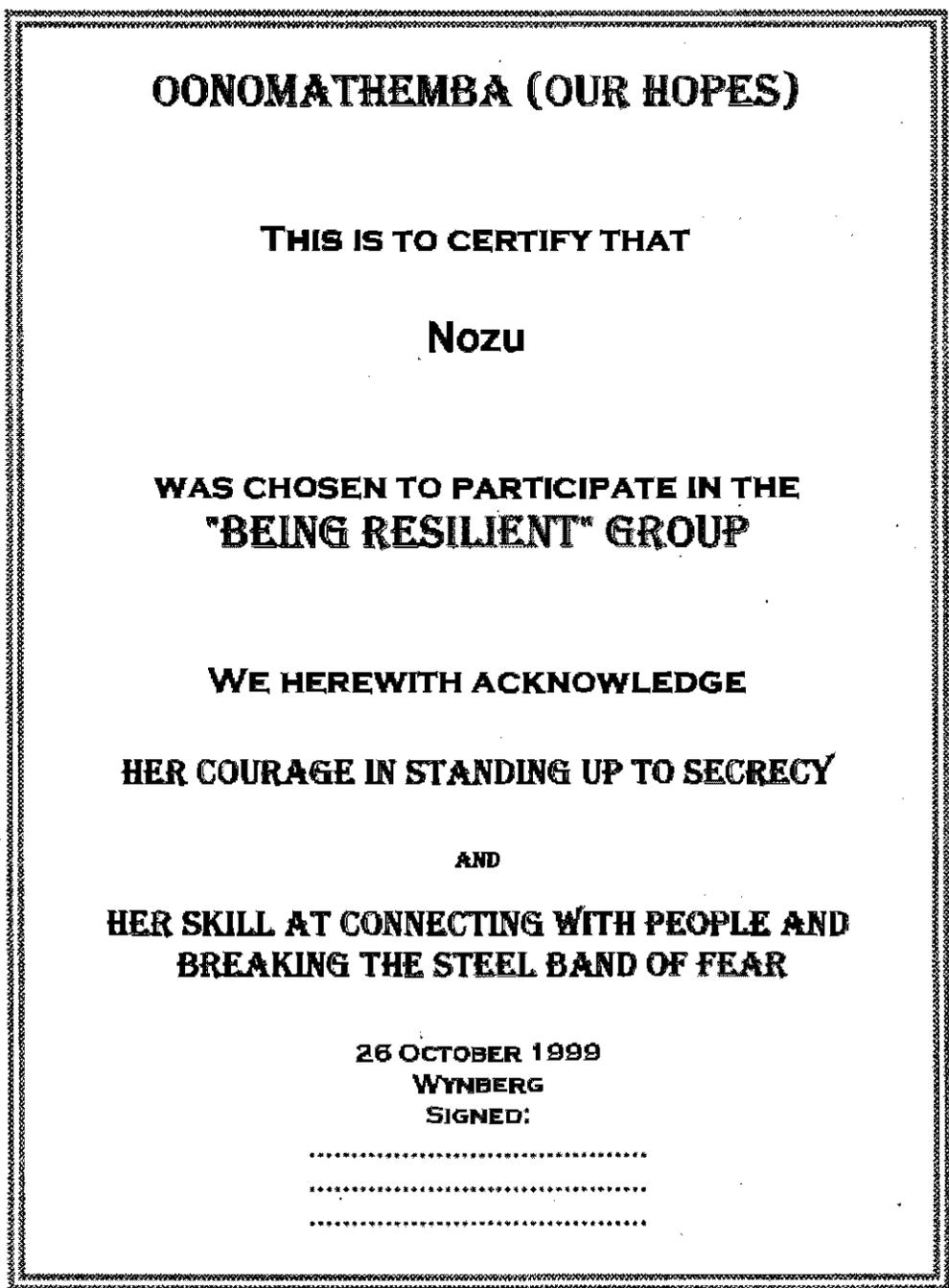
*I've learnt how others saw me, for example: "This child has got a lot of life in her".*

*I've learnt that others who have gone through problems took action.*

*I have been able to touch people's hearts.*

**5.13 Confirmation and celebration**

A celebration meeting (Adams-Westcott & Isenbart 1990:58) was arranged as a ritual based on a "rites of passage" metaphor. The celebration served to bring the group meetings to an affirmative conclusion, at which significant transformations could be celebrated and confirmed. To acknowledge the participation and contributions as well as steps taken by each participant, they were awarded certificates at the party. These certificates certified that the participant was chosen to participate in the "Being Resilient" group and then described what was especially acknowledged about that person. All participants who acknowledged these qualities in the others were invited to sign the certificate. See a reduced copy of a certificate below. A few more examples (including the certificate awarded to the school counsellor) are included in Appendix 3.



### 5.14 Reflections by the school counsellor

The school counsellor, who was a co-therapist for the group, reflected that *the support of the group and the "shared experiences" seemed to be invaluable to the girls and was something that individual therapy could possibly never achieve.* Her reflections echo the ideas Weaver expressed by saying that *group therapy can assist the survivor to "normalise" her experience by working through the healing process with others who can empathise with and understand the painful impact of traumatic encounters. Such groups can be a natural bridge in the process of re-connecting with the community when survivors are tempted to withdraw and isolate themselves (Weaver 1993:397).*

She also thought that *for the girls who were not confident to speak about their own lives in a one-to-one situation, it was an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and express some of the emotions linked to these experiences without having to tell their whole story.* She saw this as quite a breakthrough particularly for one participant who previously very rarely acknowledged the realities of her life. I believe that the alternative "realities" that were made available to participants might have facilitated this.

### 5.15 Participants' reflections on the influence of faith and the faith community

A pastoral narrative approach, like the ecological model which will be described shortly, gives a lot of attention to *the social, cultural and political context of victimisation* and emphasises *the community as a source of recovery and resiliency (Harvey 1996:7).* Some of the concerns raised by participants brought the importance of discourses in the various communities of which participants were members, to the fore. Discourses about families and how children should be treated were particularly relevant to many of the participants (see Newsletter 3). Discourses within faith communities also affected participants. Questions were asked in the group about how faith and the faith community contributed to participants' lives. The following section looks at reflections of two participants on how their faith influenced the way they have dealt with trauma.

One of the group participants, a 15 year old girl who was raped at age 11, said that even though *talking to God whenever things get a little hectic* was really sustaining her, *there was no-one at church* that she could talk to. She also said that what was said in the faith community *makes children doubt that the Lord is with them when bad things happen.* Her personal experience was however that *I always knew He was with me.* Her recommendation to the church would be to let children know that time is available for them to ask questions. She did not approach the church for help because she was afraid they might *preach and just say "The Lord is there for you. See you next time".* She does not prefer an approach to pastoral therapy which involves preaching and suggested that pastoral therapists should *ask questions and speak, not just preach.*

Another group participant agreed that her personal relationship with God was sustaining her. She added that friendships with other Christians provided additional support and that she appreciated

having Christian friends to talk to about traumatic experiences. She, however, agreed that she did not feel free to go and speak to anyone in the church about her problems.

In order to add some richness to the reflections about the influence of faith and the faith community on the way people cope with traumatic experiences; I decided to include the voice of a woman who is more actively involved in a faith community. The voice of this participant, who is married to a pastor in a Christian church, however bears a similar testimony to that of the group participants and points to some aspects of practical theology and pastoral therapy that could be attended to. I interviewed her about the role of her faith and that of the faith community in her ability to remain resilient despite trauma. She said that she became a Christian at a young age and *I was respected as the only Christian in my class at school. The other children and people knew that there was something different in me. What they saw in me was a sense of peace and levelheadedness.* She thought these qualities of her faith kept her going in traumatic times. However, her own theology was initially a hindrance to her healing:

*I had to relearn who God is. I had to change my view of God. Everything I had been taught and believed had been challenged. I do not believe everything is black and white anymore – there are no absolutes. Nobody can box God in – we will never fully understand God. We are always on an exciting journey of discovery.*

The support she received from her husband in questioning the taken-for-granted ideas about God within the faith community contributed to the sustaining role of her personal faith in traumatic times. However, the attitudes and beliefs of the faith community initially made her feel that God had abandoned her. The views they propagated were that the suffering she was going through could only be the result of *a demonic attack, punishment from God* or due to her *lack of faith*. The faith community had a *legalistic approach* which was *restrictive and lacked compassion and offered no support*. Discourses in the church contributed to the *guilt and shame* she felt since these informed her understanding that *Christians don't suffer and are not allowed to be on medication for depression*. She would thus say to people involved in pastoral therapy and practical theology: *Walk with the people. I would have loved the practical help that I am now able to give others.* Help should be *more visible* and people should meet ever so often to encourage one another. Instead of this kinds of help she experienced *judgemental treatment and a lack of understanding* in the faith community.

Despite this she said that her faith stood with her against trauma. God was as *real* to her as *water*, even though there were times when she had been angry with God and asked *Why me?* She believes that *God uses absolutely everything you go through for good*. Her experience led her to say: *God is very real to me. I understand His love for me and His deep compassion for people. He just loves everybody.* She underwrites that pastoral care should also be *non-judgemental*. Work should be done *alongside people*, to show the *acceptance and love which God showed*.

## 5.16 Concluding reflections

Although reflections about this chapter will be included in the final chapter as well, a few ideas are

raised in this section. Finding a more community-based approach to trauma counselling and to fostering resilience was one of the reasons for setting up this group. Although participants were all members of the same school community, they were also members of other diverse communities related to, for example, geographic or racial communities, or religious and linguistic communities (Harvey 1996:5). According to Harvey (1996:5) an ecological model posits that *each individual's reaction to violent and traumatic events will be influenced by the combined attributes of those communities to which s/he belongs and from which s/he draws identity*. He also proposes that *just as violent events can tax and overwhelm community resources, so community values, beliefs and traditions can bulwark community members and support their resilience in the wake of violence*. The narrative approach used in this group aimed to uncover such supportive values, beliefs and traditions, whilst at the same time deconstructing some of the discourse informing diverse communities that are not supportive.

Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:92) said:

*The function of clergy, co-ordinators and facilitators within the base community movement lies in communication, encouraging and strengthening the links between communities, extending their horizons, supporting initiatives with resources, and generally putting their skills and training at the service of such communities.*

These functions and the movement's recommendation and practice of "accompanying" rather than "leading" fits with the collaborative stance that accompanies a narrative approach to pastoral therapy. I strove to let the above mentioned functions guide the group work described in this chapter. This had the implication that although space was given for reflection on faith and richer descriptions of the role God played in resilience, these reflections were limited to the few participants who volunteered descriptions of how God has assisted them. More questions could have been asked about the meaning they created from these experiences in the light of their faith, as well as how the faith community contributed or detracted from preferred meanings.

## 5.17 Conclusion

The co-constructing process initiated in this group is continuous and cannot be reduced to the words in this chapter. To inquire about how the process has been continuing, as well as to contribute to its continuance, I plan to write letters to all participants in the new year, so as to catch up with them. With their feedback and consent, I would also like to let them know how the others are authoring their lives by writing a newsletter to send to all.

The voices and recommendations of the group participants and other people consulted in the course of this study hold significant ideas for practical theology and pastoral therapy. Reflections and questions such as those which formed part of this study could probably more easily be asked of groups of people within the same faith or church community. This sharing could in turn ensure collaboration within the faith community and could contribute to the fulfilment of some of the recommendations participants made for leaders within the faith and therapeutic communities. These recommendations and reflection on the study as a whole follow in chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS

### 6.1 Introduction

At the start of this study I signalled the need for a reflective stance in an open-ended study such as this. In this final chapter, as in those preceding it, I attempt to adopt such a position by reflecting on the study as a whole, and on the questions it possibly answered. New questions it poses and some of the possible implications and guidelines it suggests both for therapeutic discourses and for practical theology and pastoral therapy discourses will also be reflected on.

### 6.2 Reflections

Questions posed at the outset of this study focused on an inquiry as to how a narrative approach to pastoral therapy could guide conversations with people who have survived traumatic experiences. Chapter 2 provided an epistemological and theological framework for my preference of a narrative approach to pastoral therapy. Chapter 3 provided a brief look at some of what has been said about the concept "resilience" in literature, so as to place my preferred conception in contrast to other discourses. I also looked at discourses related to the handling of trauma, so as to contextualise my preference for a narrative approach. This preference can be best defended by my desire to honour the narrative practices of *respect*, of *positioning myself to the people that I meet*, of *enrolling people in their own knowledges*, of *communities of concern*, of *honouring people*, of *celebration and joy* and of *alternative histories* (Epston 1999: Workshop). I trust that the processes described in this study reflected these practices, and placed it in contrast to some of the pathologising discourses touched on in chapter 3.

The descriptions of conversations which formed part of this study in chapters 4 and 5, illustrated how the narrative *statement of position maps* (White 1998: Workshop) were used to externalise the effects of trauma in various domains of living. The dominant plot that trauma had been painting of the participants' lives was exposed and ways of living that were preferred could be honoured. By eliciting liberating stories to compete with the constraining, dominant narrative the participants could re-author their lives (Sheinberg 1992:202). A statement of position map also guided an exploration of resilience as seen in unique outcomes. This map addressed the inquiry about how pastoral narrative therapy can contribute and play a role in understanding the consequences of traumatic experiences and understanding "resilience" and healing in the face of trauma.

Rich descriptions of resilience were co-created through landscape of action and landscape of identity questions, which facilitated the process of co-authoring alternative stories. In chapter 4 it was shown how the counterplot was further thickened by various maps of re-telling, such as interviewing the therapist as the client; *saying hullo again*; *re-memembering and taking-it-back practices*; *audience retelling*; and *definitional ceremonies* (White 1998: Workshop). Letters were used as therapeutic documents, and outsider witnesses and audiences were invited to join in the co-constructing of the client's preferred self-narrative.

Other questions asked at the outset of this study centred on how pastoral narrative therapy can make a contribution to support skills and knowledges of "resilience" and healing. How these knowledges and skills could be shared within a community/group set-up was also speculated about. Rich descriptions of Thandi's skills formed part of our conversations right from the start (see letter 1) and continued throughout. As is evident in Newsletter 2, these skills could be celebrated and more richly described in the group. Newsletter 1 bears witness to how the narrative maps of audiences and re-telling were used to facilitate sharing skills related to "resilience" despite trauma.

The conversations with Thandi illustrate how a narrative approach can be used to re-engage with experience of trauma in a way that would give voice to stories of hope and "resilience", rather than re-traumatise the client. Her reflections (as quoted in chapter 4) bear witness to the fact that pastoral narrative therapy can contribute to changing the meanings attached to traumatic experiences. How faith and the faith community influence the way people cope with the challenges posed by traumatic experiences was also partially answered by Thandi and some of the group participants. Both Thandi and some of the group participants believed that their faith helped them cope in traumatic times, but there was little support from the officials within the faith community. These aspects were reflected on at the end of chapter 5. Recommendations follow in the next section. I believe that this study described an example of how narrative practices facilitate preferred, alternative ways of being in the world despite having experienced trauma.

The main purposes of this study were firstly to explore how a pastoral narrative approach can find new ways of increasing understanding about the effects of trauma, and secondly, to explore how a pastoral narrative approach and narrative therapeutic practices can assist people in living in alternative, preferred ways. These purposes were met through the descriptions of the therapeutic process in which Thandi and I were collaboratively involved, as well as in the group process.

A secondary aim, which was to look at ways in which stories of "resilience" and healing in the face of trauma can be shared, and to explore the effect of such sharing, was partially met in the group meetings, as well as in the way participants were able to find audience to these changes both inside and outside the group. The other secondary aim of the study which entailed exploring the influence of faith and the faith community in attaining the knowledges and skills reflected in stories of "resilience" and healing in the face of trauma, so as to be able to reflect on its significance for the pastoral therapy community, the research community and religious communities of the country, will be attended to in more detail in the section which follows.

Although most of the questions asked at the outset of this study were partially answered, the main purpose of the study could have been met to an even greater extent by further exploration of case studies of narrative work with both individuals and groups. More specifically, group work within a faith community or church set-up could generate richer descriptions of how members of that community perceive practical theology and pastoral therapy. Such groups could also be consulted about recommendations concerning approaches to pastoral therapy.

### 6.3 Implications and recommendations for practical theology and pastoral therapy

A question posed at the beginning of this study was: *How can richer descriptions of preferred ways of living after trauma guide conversations with others at risk?* The narratives which were voiced as part of this study support efforts to develop the role of the church (and practical theology) as described by Pieterse (1996:61). He proposes that within a postmodern cultural-political context, where cultures and identities can never wholly separate, the role of the church (both in terms of mutual care and pastoral care) is linked to an appreciation of *the power of difference* and to a re-discovery of our religious legacy which is *to listen, learn and love unconditionally*. These words echo those of participants who called for less judgemental attitudes.

More specifically Pieterse (1996:61) suggests that the church should *align itself to the importance of a discursive framework within which different groups can assert their interests*; the church should *create space for different groups to share and express subjective understandings with a view of fostering critical alliances*; the church should provide a *caring and supportive environment* and should *renew theology and spirituality* so that people from different sectors can meet and have *cross-identity cultural experiences* which can be part of *religious praxis*. These recommendations are especially relevant to the South African context and he warns that *the church has to resist the temptation of returning to an inwardly focused stance, now that the "official" apartheid system has been dislodged* (Pieterse 1996:60). I agree with him that *"being in the world" means that we need to roll up our sleeves and get into the thick of everyday politics and development*. A narrative approach to pastoral therapy makes this a real possibility, since it is in accordance with the Just Therapy approach (Waldegrave 1990:7) supported and mentioned in chapter 4.

This view could be linked to an emphasis on a move towards social transformation in practical theology. Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:90) said that *critical reflection on the church leads directly to a discussion of how one can change and transform it to become a prophetic agent of transformation*. They looked at how developing basic Christian communities can *take the gospel out of the possession of those with power and formal authority* and how such communities can *take it for their own, to struggle in faith and out of their life experience with the meaning of Christian existence* (1991:91). As mentioned earlier they describe the function of clergy, co-ordinators and facilitators as being in *communication, encouraging and strengthening the links between communities, extending their horizons, supporting initiatives with resources, and generally putting their skills and training at the service of such communities* (1991:92). This fits with the collaborative stance that accompanies a narrative approach to pastoral therapy.

Recommendations could then also be made with regard to the training of those involved in pastoral care and therapy. Cochrane, de Gruchy and Petersen (1991:100) also noted:

*...one of the major stumbling blocks the Church faces in attempting to relate to public life and practice in crisis, is the priest or minister who so often has no tools, no background, no experience by which to understand what is needed; and therefor, no means to think theologically or act pastorally and liturgically in relation to public practice and social crisis.*

Participants in this study indicated that although mutual care amongst the faith community sustained them in traumatic times, they did not feel free to seek pastoral care. This was partially due to fears of being judged or preached at, perhaps because of the above mentioned lack of tools in the leadership. Questions should thus be raised about training practices and theological ideas which might encourage this kind of pastoral care and therapy, so as to facilitate the development of more appropriate training for officials within the faith community. I therefor ask with Cochrane, de Gruchy and Petersen (1991:105):

*...a situation of deep crisis, turmoil and anomie. How do we avoid abstracting training of leadership, the communication of the gospel, and programmes of theological education from this reality?...How do we chart programmes that lead away from models of the past, that actively involve those most directly affected by the currents of crisis, and that thereby generate a new level and type of leadership and stewardship in the church?*

I believe this study supports the notion that training guided by the narrative practices of *respect*, of *positioning oneself to the people that you meet*, of *enrolling people in their own knowledges*, of *communities of concern*, of *honouring people*, of *celebration and joy* and of *alternative histories* (Epston 1999:Workshop) could provide the tools needed to facilitate such a *new type of leadership*. Such leadership will most likely contribute to faith communities and its officials acquiring values, skills and understandings which could make the recognition of "resilience" despite trauma easier.

In section 2.3.1 I explained how the recommendations mentioned in this section fit with my postmodern theological and epistemological positions and the related guidelines of Pieterse (1996:60-61). One of the guidelines was *reflexivity*, described as *being able to continuously and very deliberately subject one's practice (individually and collectively) to scrutiny and critique, as the very "essence" of learning and acting politically*. The following sections will be an attempt to continue the reflexivity which I set out to employ from the outset of this study.

#### 6.4 Critique

I agree with Pieterse (1996:60) that the *open-ended and tentative character* of postmodern research should compel one to appreciate

*...the contradictory, ambiguous, conflictual, risky, insecure, peripheral and creative dimensions of everyday life. In short, it allows space for my humanity and simultaneously injects a restlessness into any moment of contentment, because any configuration of people, environment and resources usually excludes or marginalises someone's voice and/or identity. In this perpetual alertness for who or what is being marginalised, a certain capacity evolves to develop politics and agenda which seeks to tie different types of margins together, without yielding to the incentive to simply become another or different centre of power, in the Foucauldian sense of how a power/knowledge nexus operates.*

(Pieterse 1996:60)

Some of the *different types of margins* that I hoped to *tie together* in this study did not find a voice. This was partially due to the limited scope of this study and because the clients were seen as the experts and thus co-determined the content of our conversations. Even so I would have liked to have been able to address the TRC recommendation that victim and perpetrator alike need healing (TRC 1998:3). I also wanted to explore how a narrative approach to pastoral therapy and trauma counselling, could incorporate traditional and indigenous modes of treatment (TRC 1998:13). Although these topics were touched on in the group, rich descriptions were not generated. These explorations could be part of the continuation and extension of this research which I hope to do in the near future.

I hope that this study is not read as final answer to the questions which inspired it, but would rather serve to inspire more questions about the taken-for-granted. Some of the questions it has inspired me to ask and which I hope to co-research in future include: How can traditional and indigenous modes of treatment be incorporated in pastoral therapy, especially in working with people who have experienced trauma? How does a narrative approach to pastoral therapy open or close possibilities for such incorporation? Which discourses within faith communities are sustaining of its members who have had traumatic experiences and which discourses are alienating? How can a narrative approach to pastoral therapy facilitate the development of more sustaining discourses within faith communities? How can postmodern theological and epistemological discourses assist the church to *develop more concrete and action-defined understandings of our roles in society and also in a differentiated "community of believers"* (Pieterse 1996:60)? These questions stem from my own ideas generated by this study, and I hope to add to them or revise them in collaboration with future co-researchers.

## 6.5 An open ending

*I have reached no conclusions, have erected no boundaries  
shutting out and shutting in, separating inside  
from outside: I have  
drawn no lines:*

*as  
manifold events of sand  
change the dunes' shape that will not be the same shape  
tomorrow,*

*so I am willing to go along, to accept  
the becoming  
thought, to stake off no beginnings or ends, establish  
no walls*

(Ammons in McNamee & Gergen 1992:166)

*More is more*, but unfortunately, due to the limited scope of this study, I will have to end my writing here. Fortunately, this does not imply that the story ends, since just as each of our own self-narratives continues to evolve and change with new experiences (McLean 1997:116) the stories in this study will continually re-invent themselves with each new reading. The multitude of stories generated by the continuous co-constructing process could not be captured between the pages of this study. I would like to be involved in further rich descriptions of such stories in the future, but for now *...I am willing to go along, to accept the becoming...*

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## Appendix 1

**Interview Excerpts:** 21 July 1999: David Epston and Ilse Appelt as "Thandi" (in bold)  
3 & 10 August 1999: Client and Ilse Appelt as therapist

(Note: The format and procedure are explained in section 4.4. )

CLIENT: *...I've come up with a lot of answers for questions...not really questions, but a lot of things that I've worried about. Everything has been becoming clearer to me as I've been speaking to you.*

ILSE: Can you give me one or two examples?

CLIENT: *Like with my mom, I thought that she was being very selfish and only cared about herself...but now I see that how she's always shown that she loves me. I always thought she was avoiding showing me that she loves me. ...I've learnt to understand what she feels like when I have to leave.*

\*\*\*\*\*

ILSE: You mentioned that you can cope better. What have you learnt about that?

CLIENT: *Firstly with Evil Spirit at home...I wasn't really aware...I knew that there was something when I got home, that made me not want to do anything, but I wasn't actually aware that I could fight it. I could resist it, all these feelings I had....Now I do things with my mom...*

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: **...Thandi, are Evil Spirit and Negative Spirals in any way linked together?**

CLIENT: *In a way that if I feel Evil Spirit I become negative and then Negative Spiral starts taking place. So sort of like Evil Spirit sets the things off and then Negative Spiral takes over and then more Negative Spirals come.*

ILSE: So they like working together?

CLIENT: *At home. But then when I'm not at home Evil Spirit does not really exist, but Negative Spiral is there.*

ILSE: What do you think about what I said, that we've been looking at the skills and knowledges that you have to use against them?

CLIENT: *That's so true. You've asked me how can I use that. And mostly you've been asking me and I have been coming up with answers, whereas before I had no clue what was going on...so you have been encouraging me to come up with my answers...*

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: **How did you make up your mind? First of all, what was going on in your mind that you even thought about doing what you did? How did you even think about it in the first place?**

CLIENT: *It was the pressure that I had and the lust for feeling free, you know. Feeling ..I was so used to forgetting about the things that happen and carrying on with my life, but I was longing to be like a normal person and smile again and I just couldn't resist it. And I just knew I would do anything to take that feeling I had that day away...I thought about advice that it is better to talk about things when they are hurting, so I decided to do it.*

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: **So let me just get it straight. You formed a ...What would you call this, what words would you use to say what you were doing here? Is this an ethic, a policy, a practice...I don't know. What word would you use? How would you describe what was going on in your mind?**

CLIENT: *I would say that it was like a huge conflict inside me, between wrong and right.*

ILSE: What was wrong and what was right?

CLIENT: *Telling was wrong and not telling was right. You know, from our point of view and from how I was brought up.*

ILSE: So was it sort of standing up against what you were told to do?

CLIENT: *Yeah, and my people.*

ILSE: Did you also believe that you shouldn't tell?

CLIENT: *Yes. I mean if you were brought up "you don't touch that" or "that is magical" then you tend to really believe that it is magical.*

ILSE: How come you were able to do it then despite that?

CLIENT: *I don't know. I would say maybe the Lord spoke to me and said this is the way you can help yourself. I have no idea why. But I know the feelings inside me was what I really wanted to get rid of.*

THANDI: I think if I link it to my belief in the Lord, then it is some kind of stand or belief.

DAVID: **Could you...if you find this question intrusive just let me know...but could you sort of have me understand your relationship with God? What kind of God are you related to?**

CLIENT: *The Christian God; to Jesus.*

THANDI: Well, just one small example was an oral that I had to do and I didn't feel very prepared at all and I often don't feel that confident in speaking and somehow it was as if I could just do it so well and it just sort of flowed out of me and it didn't feel as if it was I that sort of initiated it.

DAVID: **Did He kind of speak for you or did He encourage you to speak for yourself or something else?**

CLIENT: *I would say He spoke for me. It was actually Him speaking through me. Because I had no idea what I was going to say.*

THANDI: I think He encouraged me to speak for myself.

ILSE: That's how I interpreted it, because you said He helped you to speak, but you still had to use your body to do it.

CLIENT: *Yes, I understand. But I still think He spoke through me. I had nothing in front of me. I would say that maybe in your way He encouraged me to speak if I prepared something but was just scared to speak out, but I prepared had two lines. All the other words just came out.*

ILSE: And in other areas of your life, do you think He would speak for you without any of your input, or do you think He will encourage you to speak for yourself?

CLIENT: *I think He'll encourage me to speak for myself.*

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: **...After you made the plan. What did you do next?**

CLIENT: *I didn't actually decide. I just got up and went to excuse myself from the class and I came to see the counsellor. It was also sort of like somebody was guiding me. I didn't really sit down and think about it.*

ILSE: You must have got up...

CLIENT: *Yes, I got up. So somehow I must have made a decision.*

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: **Now I know ....who were these people who were giving you advice?**

CLIENT: *A couple of school friends. It is not like they were talking to me personally at that time. You know when you struggle or care about people and you think it is a good thing, you take their advice, you learn things from other people, even though they are not referring it to you. I heard a lot of people speak about "when you have troubles, you must speak about it".*

THANDI: They were friends and also teachers.

DAVID: **It is one thing to receive advice. How did you then act on their advice?**

CLIENT: *Before I never thought that I would speak about it, to me it helped not to speak about it...because the main thing was that we weren't allowed to talk about things that happened to us, that affected our being, that was embarrassing and could bring disgrace. This was our tradition, we tend to keep quiet...so if you hear anything bad about another family...but at that point I would do anything to get rid of the feeling, to erase it...*

\*\*\*\*\*

ILSE: I remember you said you found it quite odd that they (the outsider witnesses) were talking about you as if you were not there.

CLIENT: *Yes, I found that very strange. Like they put themselves in a place where it was sort of like they've heard about this girl, and they sort of like watched her on TV or something like that, and now they were discussing her, and it was as if I wasn't here. They never said anything that was referred to me directly...*

ILSE: How did you feel in that situation?

CLIENT: *It was just weird. I didn't really feel uncomfortable, but it was very surprising. It was strange in the way that if it was me who had to do that I would have said...like that other said I wish I could have said to Thandi, I would have just said "Thandi, I think you should go for it..."*

ILSE: For me, when I was on the receiving end, it was nice because you didn't have to respond.

CLIENT: *Yes, you don't have to add any bits and pieces, you could just listen.*

ILSE: What did you say were the main things that they said that stood out for you, that you hadn't thought about before?

\*\*\*\*\*

THANDI: Well, they both actually mentioned that they saw me as a pioneer.

DAVID: **Did that ring true for you or did you think they were talking through their hats?**

CLIENT: *I didn't actually look at myself as that, but thinking about it, it's got some truth in it.*

THANDI: Well, it wasn't something that I actually thought of in those terms before but it was something that I could connect with.

\*\*\*\*\*

CLIENT: *Having the team there was very nerve-racking at first and I was so scared. I was thinking what are these people going to do, they've got a video camera, they're going to see my face, what are they going to do with this information that I'm telling them. Are they going to laugh at me or what?*

ILSE: Can you give me advice, because I am very interested in this? What would have made it easier for you? Do you have ideas about how I could have done it differently? Do you think it is enough knowing that it belongs to you and that it is confidential?

CLIENT: *Yes, it is very good knowing that it is confidential and it belongs to me and if you want to use it you are first going to ask me, if I say NO, it's no, so at least I feel that I've got some control over it. But really, I mean you have to keep a record, because even I will be able to see my progress if I look back in three months time. And some other things I told you and came up with while I was speaking to you, maybe I forget about them, then I can listen to the tape and think this is the idea I had, maybe let me try it out, maybe it's going to work. So it is better this way.*

\*\*\*\*\*

CLIENT: *Firstly I must say I've got a different idea in my mind of a pioneer.*

ILSE: How do you see a pioneer?

CLIENT: *A person that can sort of like motivate other people; and a person that doesn't really give up; that works hard; and they manage to get through some difficulties.*

ILSE: And that's what you think the witness team and I noticed in you?

CLIENT: Yes.

ILSE: David says that a pioneer not only has those qualities, although they are very important for a pioneer, but a pioneer is also the one that goes first. You have to break the road open. How would you link being a pioneer with premature wisdom?

CLIENT: *You go through that road first before anyone else gets to it and so you experience it at every stage before other people get through it.*

ILSE: Do you think wisdom is the same as experience?

CLIENT: *You learn from it. You experience it and you learn from it. You keep it and you try what you've learnt from it or any mistakes you made you learn from. It is something that you are always going to keep in you.*

ILSE: And do you think that is important? To keep those parts?

CLIENT: *Yes. The things that you learnt from it.*

\*\*\*\*\*

ILSE: What advice would you as a young person give to adults?

CLIENT: *You must build trust between you and your child.*

ILSE: And has your mom also in a way made this possible for you?

CLIENT: *It was hard at first. There was tension and awkwardness, but now it's fine. The awkwardness has gone.*

\*\*\*\*\*

ILSE: David asked if it fits with you, this term of being a pioneer?

THANDI: Well I think in a sense it does, but it is also uncomfortable because it's not always easy.

CLIENT: *Definitely not easy. It is definitely not easy.*

DAVID: Well, who said pioneering was easy. It is always people that go first ...say you were going down a track that had been trodden by many before you, that would be pretty easy wouldn't it? But to go first...you never know what is up ahead. Does that help you? Does that in any way make the idea of pioneering a bit easier... to bear the weight of it?

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: Were you expecting that (sympathy) from therapy? Or..?

CLIENT: *Yes. Because some people (in my community) would think I am over-reacting. Those are the type of responses that you get from my people. So it sort of puts people off (speaking about trauma), especially from my community, because those things (violent beatings) are basically known as, you know, normal things.*

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: How is it that then you blamed yourself for what your brother had done?

CLIENT: *If I hadn't got out of bed and went to stop the argument between my mom and my brother, obviously I wouldn't have got involved; I wouldn't have ended up in the position I was in.*

ILSE: So in a sense the fact that you went to help your mom, you blamed yourself for that? What does it say about you, the fact that you willing to get out of bed to help your mom?

CLIENT: *Firstly, obviously I love my mom. And I didn't want her being disrespected by anybody and that I wanted to help.*

ILSE: And are those things that you also think you should blame yourself for, or do they stand against self-blame?

CLIENT: *A lot of times, me wanting to help always gets me into some trouble or bad situation.*

ILSE: Is that something you want to blame yourself for, does it fit with self-blame, or are you okay with wanting to help others?

CLIENT: *I don't want to blame myself for that.*

ILSE: Is there anything else you want to add to how come you blamed yourself?

CLIENT: *I felt that if I had fought back...which is a bit impossible, I would have conquered him. Or managed to not get into the situation that I was in.*

THANDI: Since I've been a little girl ...there is quite a lot of violence in the community...I've just been determined that I'd never let that happen to me - I'd fight back.

DAVID: And have there been times in the past that you did fight back?

THANDI: I think when the violence against me wasn't as severe.

CLIENT: *Not physically fighting back. No, I'm lying, because this was the second time that my brother beat me up. The first time I didn't really fight back, but I was helped by other people. So this was the first time that I had to fight.*

DAVID: I see. I'm just asking, not taking sides in any way...but was there any wisdom, when you really think about it, was there any wisdom in your decision to go against your policy of fighting back in this situation?

CLIENT: *Yes. If I had fought back at that stage, my brother would have got more angry and I would have been more bruised or something more severe would have happened to me.*

ILSE: Do you think your premature wisdom maybe even helped you in that situation?

CLIENT: Yes.

THANDI: Well, Ilse and I have actually spoken about that and ...

DAVID: Oh, great.

THANDI: Although I realise that had I fought back I probably would have been beaten even more severely, I realise that...but I still feel that I betrayed that sort of Tom-boy part of myself who said that I wouldn't let that happen.

ILSE: Is it true that you still sometimes feel...?

CLIENT: *Well, that's how I felt at that stage, but now I see clearly that it's fine that I did that.*

\*\*\*\*\*

CLIENT: Yes. You know, sometimes it is better not to fight back...

THANDI: Yeah. I can see that if I had maybe physically fought back I, I mean...

DAVID: Might not be here today...

THANDI: Yes.

DAVID: Do you think that in any way your speaking out is a form of fighting back?

CLIENT: Yeah. It is a way, because I can actually now take care of myself. I'm learning to take care of myself.

ILSE: Do you think every time your brother sees that...do you think he also experiences it as you fighting back...he sees that violence couldn't get you down?

CLIENT: I think he does.

THANDI: Yes. I suppose it is.

DAVID: If that is possible and conceivable, now that you are thinking about it, do you think in any way that any of your accomplishments - your running, or your academic work - is that in any way possibly conceived as a way of fighting back?

CLIENT: I would say yes, and it is a very good example to other people, who look at very little things, and then they get brought down by those things.

THANDI: I suppose I could have just sat in a heap and have given up on many more things...let negative spiral just take over, which I am sometimes tempted to do.

\*\*\*\*\*

ILSE: Do you think he would have noticed the difference, let's say if you just sort of gave up and sat in a heap and was gloomy, compared to how you have reacted and that you have gone back.

CLIENT: I really don't know, but I don't think so. I'm really more on the negative side about that.

ILSE: Someone else once asked in a similar situation, do you think there is enough of a sense of justice for you if you know that your are fighting back?

CLIENT: Yes. As long as I know that I'm doing it for that reason. It is fine, but it would be even more meaningful if he knew.

\*\*\*\*\*

CLIENT: I started to blame myself less, because I know that I sort of had to go and stop them. And the fact that I didn't fight back, it helped me a lot. So I've stopped blaming myself for what I did.

ILSE: Has that been something important to you? To look at it differently?

CLIENT: Yes. It's just given me some confidence.

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: Oh. Hold on. Let me just ask: Do you think she (Ilse) would be able to guess what you are going to say now? Do you think she'll be able to guess what you are going to say? Do you think she knows you well enough to predict what you're going to say about what happened?

CLIENT: Yes, I think she would, because she knows what happens when I go home: the little conflicts and shouting. And you know that Evil Spirit takes place at our home and how I've tried to fight it when I'm home. And you know that I try to talk to my mom and express my feelings.

ILSE: And what do you think I would have predicted? Would I have predicted that you would have been able to use those skills?

CLIENT: I think so. Let's hope for the best.

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: ...What would you give her for, you know, guessing about you? What percent do you think, when she guesses about you, she's you know, on the mark? And what percent would you say she's off the mark?

CLIENT: 75% on the mark... she is getting better. She knows how I approach certain things....

DAVID: So what are you going to tell her about these holidays?

CLIENT: I tried to keep Evil Spirit away as much as I could and I tried not to spend as much time around the house when I knew trouble was coming. I was just avoiding all these odd things that would lead into me being negative...And this weekend I had an argument with my

*mom, and I went to say sorry to her...I apologised for being rude, but explained that I was just viewing my ideas.*

**ILSE:** Is that quite new for you?

**CLIENT:** Yes.

**ILSE:** And is it something quite pleasing to you?

**CLIENT:** *It is very hard to do because your are not sure if she will understand or not, but it is quite pleasing to know that I've said it and she understood.*

**ILSE:** So is that "trust" and that "truth" between you and your mom being built on?

**CLIENT:** Yes.

**THANDI:** Well, I hope that I would be able to tell her that the sort of realisation that I had that my brother's actions weren't...worth me blaming myself. That those actions didn't warrant such a response.

**DAVID:** ... When you say that, what do you think Ilse will say back?

**CLIENT:** *She'd say that...I think that was what she's hoping for. I still feel that he knew what he was doing. She would be happy if I had come the realisation that it wasn't my fault, because the more I blame myself the more I have a load on my shoulders, the more I think I should do something.*

**ILSE:** What would I do? Would I just say I'm really happy to hear that?

**CLIENT:** *You'd probably ask what made me realise that it was not my fault? Because you always ask questions.*

**THANDI:** Well, I think she'd agree with that point of view. She might ask me some more question about how I managed to...

\*\*\*\*\*

**DAVID:** Does she ask many questions? Do you remember when you think back to all the questions that Ilse's asked you, any that kind of stand out as what you would say "well, that was a good one"? Can you think of any? One that really got your mind going in some way that it hadn't gone before?

**CLIENT:** *I can't remember the specific question, but I can remember what it made me realise the bond between me and my dad - how close I was to him. And the bond between me and my mom. How she really wanted to show me how much she appreciated me.*

**THANDI:** I think that one about the wisdom in maybe not fighting back. That could have been something.

**DAVID:** Aha. That was a question that Ilse asked. Isn't it strange I asked the same one? Did you notice that? I asked something like that, didn't I? Why do you think we both came up with the same question? ...

**CLIENT:** *Maybe you see the same thing about me. Maybe...It has to do with what you see in me and what you think I...you're interested in the same thing that is in me.*

**ILSE:** The skills and knowledges in you?

**CLIENT:** *Yes. I didn't really know what to expect from counselling. I just thought of this person sitting, writing, asking me to tell them about my life. It was a pleasant surprise for me. It was exactly what I did not expect.*

**ILSE:** In a good or bad way?

**CLIENT:** *In a good way, I expected something really drastic. Shoo. Even my friends, they still ask me : What do you do in counselling?*

**ILSE:** What do you say then?

**CLIENT:** *Well, I talk. That's what I tell them: you talk. Answering questions, discuss things. It helps.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**DAVID:** You know, when you're thinking of going into counselling would you have believed, if I said to you then: "Look I've got news for you Thandi, in three months time, this is what you are going to be saying, just what you just said". Would you have believed me, or would you have thought I should go and see a psychiatrist or something?...

**CLIENT:** *I would have said you are lying.*

**ILSE:** Really?

**CLIENT:** *Yes. I would not have expected counselling would bring about the solutions we've brought up, this brightness and stuff. I am very much surprised by the brightness. It is amazing.*

\*\*\*\*\*

DAVID: ...say your mother heard all this conversation, but also somehow or other she understood exactly what we were talking about, right? ... What do you think she'd say? Can you guess?

CLIENT: *Firstly I would say she'd be quite surprised, not very much, but she'd be a bit surprised by what I know. But I know that she knows that I know a little bit more about life. And it would be quite a shock to her to know, you know, this is what I've gone through, because I doubt that she knows this is what I am going through. She sees me as a fine child who is coping and I doubt that she knows what I feel and that I feel what they are going through.*

ILSE: And in terms of the effects of the conversations, what would she say about that? Do you think she'd still be against it if she knew what had happened?

CLIENT: *No, no. If she knew exactly, if she had the same understanding as you and I had, she would not be against it. She would think it was something very helpful.*

THANDI: Well, I think she would probably also want to take a stand against family secrecy.

DAVID: **Would she? That would be interesting, wouldn't it?**

ILSE: Do you think she would?

CLIENT: *Yes, sure. I think so. Because as much as I want to help, she also wants to help. Although she hasn't got to a point where she knows how to help, she wants to help.*

DAVID: **We're going to stop there. It was really nice meeting you. Sounds like Ilse and you have got a pretty good counselling going, so it's nice for me to hear about your counselling and thank you for allowing me to share in it. So I'll say goodbye to you.**

THANDI: Thanks.

ILSE: What was it like for you to listen to this tape?

CLIENT: *Some answers were different, but then I wouldn't say they were very different. The majority was...you thought along the lines I thought.*

ILSE: Would you say that was about 75%?

CLIENT: *I would say it was more to 80% this time.*

ILSE: I would like to hear some of your ideas generally (perhaps you can tell me next week) - what the experience was like to hear someone else's questions. Having given permission for this tape, would you recommend this process to other people? We therapists are also learning and we would appreciate some of your ideas.

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## **Appendix 2**

**Two examples of the questions that were handed out at the end of each meeting:**

### **Reflections (1):**

What was it like to hear about the things that your school counsellor had grown to appreciate about you?

How did you experience the group and the others' reflections about you?

Did you experience your participation in the group as positive or negative? Why?

What did you find most surprising?

Did you learn something new or significant?

Which of the things that were said about you did you know already?

What would you like to remember in your everyday life and what difference would remembering this make?

What did you learn that you would like to share with someone else?

### **Reflections (3):**

What did you enjoy about today's meeting? Why?

Was there something you didn't enjoy? Why?

Which questions did you find most interesting? Why?

Do you feel that you have benefited from today's meeting or not? Why?

What did you think of the concept of life as a journey and how does this fit for you?

What are the obstacles in the way of getting to where you would prefer to be?

Which obstacles have you overcome already? And how did you do it?

Have you looked at anything in a new or surprising way today? If so, what?

What topics would you like to discuss? What has been left out? Any other suggestions?

**OONOMATHEMBA (OUR HOPES)**

**THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT**

**Sipho**

**WAS CHOSEN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE  
"BEING RESILIENT" GROUP**

**WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE**

**HER CHOICE FOR LIFE**

**AND**

**GOING FORWARD WITHOUT THE HEAVY BACKPACK OF  
THINGS IN THE PAST**

**26 OCTOBER 1999**

**WYNBERG**

**SIGNED:**

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**OONOMATHEMBA (OUR HOPES)**

**THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT**

**Thandi**

**WAS CHOSEN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE  
"BEING RESILIENT" GROUP**

**WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE**

**HER SKILL AT IDENTIFYING OBSTACLES,  
GETTING OUT OF THE MUD**

**AND**

**BRINGING LIGHT TO OTHERS**

**26 OCTOBER 1999**

**WYNBERG**

**SIGNED:**

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**OONOMATHEMBA (OUR HOPES)**

**THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT**

**Camille**

**WAS CHOSEN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE  
"BEING RESILIENT" GROUP**

**WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE**

**THE STEPS SHE IS TAKING IN GETTING HER  
TRUST BACK TOWARDS PEOPLE**

**AND**

**MOVING FROM THE LONELY, DARK PATHWAY  
TO A PATHWAY LIT BY A SHINING LIGHT**

**26 OCTOBER 1999**

**WYNBERG**

**SIGNED:**

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**OONOMATHEMBA (OUR HOPES)**

**THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT**

**Ms O'Carroll**

**CHOSE US TO PARTICIPATE IN THE  
"BEING RESILIENT" GROUP**

**WE HEREWITH ACKNOWLEDGE  
HER SKILL IN NOT JUDGING PEOPLE,  
UNDERSTANDING**

**AND**

**BEING TRUSTWORTHY**

**26 OCTOBER 1999**

**WYNBERG**

**SIGNED:**

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