Exploring the Salience of Intergenerational Trauma among Children and Grandchildren of Victims of Apartheid-Era Gross Human Rights Violations

by **Cyril Kenneth Adonis**

Abstract

Apartheid, as a systemised and institutionalised process of race-based discrimination, exploitation and oppression, left in its wake a deeply traumatised society. Many feel that this collective trauma has not been sufficiently addressed and that this has rendered the peace achieved after Apartheid's demise increasingly fragile. In addition to this, we are reminded that traumatic memories affect not only those who have personally experienced conflict and violence, but also future generations through what is known as intergenerational transmission of trauma. This paper explores the salience of intergenerational trauma in South Africa. At a conceptual level, it is framed by the life course perspective and historical trauma theory. Methodologically, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilised. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 20 children and grandchildren (females = 10, males = 10) of victims of Apartheid-era gross human rights violations. The interview data was subjected to an interpretative analytical process that yielded a number of themes which provide support for the salience of intergenerational trauma amongst descendants of victims of Apartheid-era gross human rights violations. These themes – secondary traumatisation, socio-economic and material impact, and sense of powerlessness and helplessness – are discussed along with their possible implications, and foci for further research pointed to.

Introduction

South Africa's long history of race-based oppression preceded the introduction in 1948 of formal Apartheid (an Afrikaans term meaning "separateness"), having started with the onset of colonialism in 1652 (Gibson, 2004). Although democracy was finally achieved in 1994, colonialism and Apartheid had severely damaged the social fabric of South African society. Thus, in the aftermath of Apartheid, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in order to help the country deal with its painful past. Many objections had initially been raised against the establishment of a TRC (Chapman & van der Merwe, 2008). After completion of its work, the commission also drew much criticism, including in relation to its imposition of a Christian

morality of forgiveness (Schoon as cited in Asch, 1997), its focus on restorative rather than retributive justice (Hamber, 2000), and its failure to deliver on promises made to the victims of gross human rights violations (Hamber & Kibble, 1998). For many, however, the TRC was an important milestone, demonstrating South Africa's commitment to dealing with past injustices, and commendable for its contribution towards national reconciliation (Tutu, 1999). For others, the TRC's finest achievement was held to be the role it played in the establishment of a collective memory (Minow, 1998).

It has been 22 years since Apartheid officially ended, and, by many accounts, the novelty of the *New South Africa* (the euphemism that was introduced to capture the hope, promise and expectations of post-Apartheid

South Africa) has worn off. It is widely accepted that Apartheid's racially inspired injustices had profoundly traumatised all Black South Africans[1]. Herman (1992) argues that one aspect of the past that needs to be dealt with is the long-term traumatic impact of the violence that usually accompanies civil strife. Lumsden (1997) further warns that traumatic memories of past conflict are seldom forgotten, while Bar-Tal (2003) contends that such memories come to affect not only those who have personally experienced the conflict and resultant trauma, but also successive generations through what is termed *transgenerational transmission of trauma* (Davidson & Mellor, 2001). This paper explores the salience of transgenerational trauma in a sample of Black South Africans comprising both first and second generation descendants of victims of gross human rights violations during the Apartheid era. In line with the *Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act* (1995), gross human rights violations are here defined as (a) "the killing, abduction, torture or severe ill-treatment of any person", or (b) "any attempt, conspiracy, incitement, instigation, command or procurement to commit" an act referred to in (a), with the added proviso that such an act "emanated from conflicts of the past" and that the commission of it "was carried out, advised, planned, directed, commanded or ordered, by any person acting with a political motive".

Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, this paper is framed by two interrelated theoretical strands, the first of which is the life course perspective. Also often referred to as the *sociogenetic* conceptualisation of human development (Dannefer, 1984), this is a concept that sociologists have used in reference to the interaction of the person and the environment (Maddox & Campbell, 1985). The life course perspective holds that, in examining families as they change over time, it becomes vital to go beyond the individual lifespan and the familial micro-social foci and also to investigate the unfolding history of intimate connections in families and the social context of such long-term relationships in terms of social structure and historical location (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). Hareven (2000) points to a life course perspective as providing both a developmental and a historical framework that enables scholars and policy makers to examine historical circumstances that have affected the lives of members of different generations. In this way, it offers the most promise for explaining the differences in experiences shaping individuals' respective life histories, and for illuminating the ways in which problems, needs, and patterns of adaptation had been shaped by earlier life experiences and by the historical conditions affecting them (Hareven, 2000).

Related to the life course perspective is historical trauma theory, which similarly provides a macro-level, temporal framework for examining the life course of a population exposed to trauma at a particular point in time. According to Sotero (2006), historical trauma theory is underpinned by four assumptions. Firstly, mass trauma is deliberately and systematically inflicted upon a target population by a dominant population. Secondly, trauma is not limited to a single catastrophic event, but continues over an extended period. Thirdly, traumatic events reverberate throughout the population, creating a universal experience of trauma. Fourthly, the magnitude of the trauma experience derails the population from its natural, projected historical course, resulting in a legacy of physical, social and economic disparities that persists across generations. Degruy-Leary (2005) notes that, although overt legitimisation of subjugation may be rescinded over time, its legacy remains in the form of racism, discrimination, and social and economic disadvantage. According to Brundtland (2002), historical trauma theory proceeds from the assumption that primary victims of subjugation and loss endure significant physical and psychological trauma. Secondary and subsequent generations are negatively affected by this through possible impairment of the parenting capacity of primary victims (Danieli, 1998a), as well as through both the collective memory of the population, and first-hand experience of discrimination, injustice, poverty, and inequality (Sotero, 2006). In addition, McMichael (1999) warns that psychological disorders of primary victims can be genetically transmitted to subsequent generations.

The life course perspective enables us both to identify distinct life events over the lifespan and to discover how social processes have impacted on the developmental trajectories of individuals. Historical trauma theory, in contrast, enables us to trace how the historical context created economic, social and psychological disadvantages across three generations in a population group. In the mental health context, "the construct provides a focus and a way to enter into individual stories of suffering, to locate causes, ascribe responsibility, valorise the person's struggle, and mobilise more effective responses" (Kirmayer, Gone, & Moses, 2014, p. 312).

Review of Existing Literature

Volkan (1996) defines *transgenerational transmission of trauma*[2] as denoting the way in which the unresolved

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[1] Although the term *Black* tends to refer to everyone who is not of European origin and includes, amongst others, those of Indian ancestry, the term is used here in its exclusive sense to refer only to South Africans of African origin, on the basis that the Apartheid racial categorisations are still dominant in the post-Apartheid era (Gibson, 2004).

[2] This phenomenon is also referred to as intergenerational transmission of trauma (Sigal & Weinfeld, 1987); multi-generational transmission of trauma (Danieli, 1998a); cross-generational transmission of trauma (Lowin, 1983, as cited in Kellerman, 2001); and parental transmission of trauma (Kellerman, 2001).

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traumas of the past are subliminally transmitted from one generation to another, and, in the process, come to play a pivotal role in fuelling future conflicts. Even though the study of the phenomenon is fraught with complexities (Gottschalk, 2003), some scholars, and in particular Danieli (1998a), insist on the universal existence of the phenomenon and its effects. Harvery (2007) notes that it seems almost common sense that massive trauma would have a debilitating effect on the victim, and that this would impact on the nature of the victim's personal relationships, including parenting. Yet the mental health community had initially been quite slow to grasp what would seem fairly obvious (Schwartz as cited in Harvery, 2007). Danieli (1998a) attributes this to multigenerational transmission having been treated as a secondary phenomenon, possibly because it is not as obviously dramatic as the horrific images of traumatised people. However, the 1960s witnessed increased scholarly attention being given to the phenomenon, with much of this focused on Holocaust survivors and their children (Barocas & Barocas, 1973; Sigal, Silver, Rakoff, & Ellin, 1973). More recent Holocaust studies include those of Berger (2010), Iliceto et al. (2011), Braga, Mello, and Fiks (2012), and Matz, Vogel, Mattar, and Montenegro (2015).

Further to the Holocaust studies, the salience of the phenomenon has also been investigated in other traumatised populations. These include children of United States Vietnam veterans (Davidson, Smith, & Kudler, 1989; Harkness, 1993); children of Australian Vietnam veterans (Davidson & Moller, 2001); children of World War II Japanese atomic bomb survivors (Sawada, Chaitin, & Bar-On, 2004); babies of mothers exposed to the World Trade Centre attacks during pregnancy (Yehuda, Engel, Brand, Seckl, Marcus, & Berkowitz, 2005); the transgenerational haunting of colonialism, slavery, exploitation and discrimination among African Americans (Barden, 2013); and the intergenerational effects associated with the traumatic history of the First Nations peoples in Canada (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009). More recently, Zerach, Kanat-Maymon, Aloni, and Solomon (2016) focussed on the association between the psychopathology of fathers who were former prisoners of war (ex–POWs) during the Yom Kippur War and the intergenerational transmission of captivity trauma in their adult off-spring. Nagata, Kim, and Nguyen (2015), on the other hand, examined the intergenerational effects of the Japanese American incarceration on second generation United States born offspring of incarcerees, while Boričević Maršanić, Aukst Margetić, Jukić, Matko, and Grgić (2014) directed their attention to the inter-generational transmission of psychopathology in the offspring of Croatian war veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In addition, Song, Tol, and de Jong (2014) studied the intergenerational transmission of trauma and resilience between Burundian former child soldiers and their children.

According to Aarts (1998), the notion of *conspiracy of silence* is at the heart of the dynamic that leads to transgenerational transmission of trauma. Similarly, Litvak-Hirsch and Bar-On (2006) contend that there is significant agreement among scholars that certain psychological processes are conveyed from generation to generation mainly through silence and silencing. Others have used the term *transgenerational haunting* to refer to the way trauma is secreted in families and the powerful effects that the unspoken and silence can have across generations (Luhmann, 2006). Although we are accustomed to think of silence as the absence of sound, it functions in families in ways that are much more complex (Danieli, 1998b) because of the multiple and embedded meanings it communicates (Weingarten, 2004). Thus, while the aim of silence and silencing is to shield the child from the horrors that parents have experienced, it often communicates that which is presumed to have been secreted. In this way, children come to bear witness to the unresolved trauma of the parent. While Gilligan (1997) points out that violence often has witnesses, Herman's (1992) reminder that "Witnesses as well as victims are subject to the dialectic of trauma" (p. 2) is pertinent. In similar vein, Caruth maintains that traumatic memories that remain unresolved could come to dominate the mental life of the victim (as cited in Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008). Such memories often tend to return as behavioural re-enactments at both the interpersonal and the societal levels (Herman, 1992). Volkan (2006) refers to these re-enactments as *chosen traumas*, which he defines in terms of "the shared mental representation of an event in a large group's history in which the group suffered a catastrophic loss, humiliation, and helplessness at the hands of enemies" (p. 31). Gobodo-Madikizela (2008) points to the tendency for such re-enactments to be played out in the social domain, where, according to Volkan (2006), their consequences can be dramatic and devastating. A chosen trauma can continue to exist for centuries (Volkan, 2006). To illustrate this, Volkan (1996) uses the Battle of Kosovo that took place in 1389 and yet provided the fuel for the armed conflict that raged in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995.

Given South Africa's history, it would be reasonable to expect transgenerational transmission of trauma to manifest itself in the Black community. Yet scholarly examination of the phenomenon in this context has been severely lacking, with few scholars having written on the subject in post-1994 South Africa. Simpson (1998) and Gobodo-Madikizela (2008), for example, wrote theoretical articles in which they examined trans-generationally transmitted trauma that resulted from state repression under Apartheid. Coetzer (2007), on the other hand, explored the issue through a family systems lens. More empirical work includes that of Dickerson and Fish (2009), who focused on the issue from the perspective of grandmothers' experience of confronting AIDS in the aftermath of Apartheid, while Hoosain

(2013) focused on the displacement of families in the Western Cape province during the Apartheid era within the context of its slave past.

Goals of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore the salience of transgenerational trauma in children and grandchildren of victims of gross human rights violations during the Apartheid era. This aim translated into the following guiding question: *How did the Apartheid-era abuses suffered by your parents/grandparents affect you and how do they continue to affect you?*

Method

Research Design
The study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological approach in order to explore how the trauma of victims of Apartheid-era gross human rights violations has been transmitted to and is experienced by their children and grandchildren. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects of experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, in order to create meaning and achieve a sense of under-standing (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). According to Ricoeur (1976), hermeneutics is a theory of textual interpretation. It is underpinned by the assumption that human behaviour is purposive, active and goal-directed (Schwandt, 1997), and that the interpretative inquiry takes place in a context delineated by our everyday participatory understanding of people and events (van Vlaenderen, 1997). A researcher conducts a reading of the text with the explicit aim of uncovering the meaning embedded in it (Neuman, 1997). The reader brings his or her own subjectivities to the text. When studying it, he or she tries to absorb or get inside the viewpoint it presents as a whole, and then to develop an under-standing of how its parts relate to the whole. This is known as the "hermeneutic circle", that is, the notion that understanding operates in a circular dialectical fashion (Packer & Addison, 1989), with the meaning of each part able to be understood only in relation to the whole, and that of the whole in relation to the parts (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000).

According to van Manen (1997), phenomenology can be defined as a human science, in that "the subject matter of phenomenological research is always the structures of meaning of the lived human world" (p. 11). In similar vein, Langdridge (2007) defines phenomenology as a discipline that "aims to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live and what it means to them" (p. 4). As pointed out by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), phenomenology is critical of the natural scientific method for having distanced itself too far from its basis in everyday life. Phenomenology becomes hermeneutic when its focus shifts from being purely descriptive (as in transcendental phenomenology) to being interpretative. Kafle (2011) notes that this shift is based primarily on "the rejection of the idea of suspending all personal opinions" (p. 186). Thus, while hermeneutic phenomenology is descriptive to the extent that it wants to let phenomena speak for themselves, it is also interpretative insofar as it acknowledges that there is no phenomenon that is not interpreted (Ricoeur, 1976). It is due to this emphasis on the interpretative understanding of lived consciousness, experience and meaning that hermeneutic phenomenology was selected as the ideal methodology for this study.

Sample
While Patton (1990) characterises qualitative research as focused in depth on relatively small samples, Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to qualitative research as being theory-based. Accordingly, in a grounded theory study, "the investigator examines individuals who can contribute to the evolving theory" (Creswell, 1998, p. 118). For this reason, this study employed theoretical sampling. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), theoretical sampling allows the researcher to build and broaden theoretical insights in the ongoing process of data collection and analysis. Polkinghorne (1989), as well as van Manen (1997), furthermore remind us that, in hermeneutic phenomenological research, participant selection is oriented towards identifying participants who have lived experience of the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their experience, and who, as a group, are sufficiently diverse to increase the likeli-hood of capturing richly nuanced and uniquely varied accounts of the experience under investigation. The study sample consisted of 20 children and grandchildren of Black South African Apartheid-era victims of gross human rights violations, all of whom resided in either Johannesburg or Pretoria. An equal number of males and females participated in the study. While nine (three males and six females) were grandchildren, 11 (seven males and four females) were children of victims of gross human rights violations during the Apartheid era. The participants were all at least 18 years old and therefore over the legal age of consent, which is 16 years. The mean age of the sample was 24.85 years. All the participants were also able to express themselves comfortably in English.

Data Collection and Procedure
Participants were identified and contacted through the Khulumani Support Group (KSG), an organisation established in 1995 by victims and their families in order to facilitate their engagement with the TRC. Individual meetings were set up where each potential participant was provided with a detailed description and explanation of the study, and given the opportunity to ask questions. Arrangements were then made for interviews to be conducted with those who had agreed to participate. An in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interview was conducted in English with each partici-pant. They were asked to reflect on and articulate how

abuses suffered by their parents and/or grandparents affect their lives. Probing questions were also asked in order to facilitate deeper inquiry and exploration of the participants' views. Each interview lasted as long as the participant needed to answer the questions, with most interviews lasting between 45 minutes and one hour. Interviews took place either at the residences of participants, at the KSG head office, or at the head office of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), both of which are located in Johannesburg. Those who opted to be interviewed at the latter two venues were provided with transport reimbursement of R100 each. In some cases, post-interview telephonic calls were made to participants in order to clarify ambiguities contained in the interview data. An interview summary was compiled at the end of each interview. This was geared towards capturing tacit information and was used to aid the interpretation process. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim in preparation for analysis.

It needs to be added that the interviews for this study were conducted between 2008 and 2009, more than a decade after the advent of democracy and over five years after the TRC was dissolved in 2002. While considerable time had thus elapsed since the primary traumas (the TRC covered gross human rights violations committed between 1960 and 1994), it needs to be noted that transgenerational trauma is cumulative and collective and is unlikely to be caused by a discreet event (Adonis, 2011). McKay (1997), for example, reminds us that trauma often occurs as a result of an accumulation of distressing factors, which give rise to "powerful feelings of anxiety, confusion, anger and pain" (p. 291). While trauma cannot thus be understood as necessarily related to a discrete event, the memory of the traumatic event nonetheless can become a focal point in a context of neglect or abuse. While McKay (1997) refers here to primary victims of trauma, this argument can extend to transgenerational trauma. It would therefore follow that the trauma experienced by younger generations is likely to be attributable to the cumulative impact of both the trauma suffered by the parents and grandparents and then transmitted to sub-sequent generations, as well as to distressing factors associated with abuse or neglect. The memory of the traumatic event experienced by parents and grand-parents would thus serve as a crystallising experience or point to explain and justify the cumulative trauma of a history of distressing factors. It could be argued that, in this case, abuse and neglect is manifested in more proximate factors, such as the contemporary overt racism, as well as institutionalised racism, that subject Black South Africans to micro-aggressions on an almost daily basis. Another significant proximate factor would be the continuing structural violence that entrenches inequality and perpetuates the poverty that many of the participants in this study find themselves trapped in. As

noted by Galtung (1969), structural violence is systemic and typically embedded in the societal structure and cultural institutions. As such, Freire (1968/1998) notes that structural violence interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to achieve self-actualisation. Structural violence therefore underpins the continuing disempowerment of not only victims of gross human rights violations, but also their descendants.

Data Analysis
According to Smith and Osborn (2003), interpretative phenomenological analysis acknowledges that it is not possible to access an individual's lifeworld directly because there is no clear and unmediated window into that life. Investigating how events and objects are experienced and given meaning therefore requires interpretative activity on the part of both the participant and the researcher. This is referred to as a "double hermeneutic", which Smith and Osborn (2003) describe as a dual process in which "the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (p. 51). In addition, we are reminded that hermeneutic phenomenology is not a prescriptive data analytical approach, but rather offers a set of flexible guidelines which researchers can adapt according to their research aims (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In seeking to understand individuals' lived experience and their subjective understanding of their personal world, the task of the researcher is to facilitate the emergence of the focal phenomenon and in turn to make sense of what it reveals of itself. This understanding is gained by the researcher through examining participants' accounts reflexively, being aware of his or her own perspective with regard to the topic, and being alert throughout the process of interpretation to the fact that the pre-existing knowledge and attitudes brought to the topic by the researcher can, at best, be only partially bracketed (or separated) from his or her analysis of the data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) also point to contextualised interpretation in hermeneutic phenomenology as informed by direct engagement with existing theoretical constructs. For these reasons, interpretative phenomenological analysis was deemed a suitable method of analysis for the current study, as it allowed for both phenomenological understanding and a theoretically informed analysis of how the trauma of victims of Apartheid-era gross human rights violations has been transmitted to, and is experienced by, their children and grandchildren.

Each transcribed interview was first read and re-read in order to become familiar with its content. The parts relating most centrally to the focus of the study were then extracted. Thereafter, salient themes and recurring ideas or language relevant to the study's focus were identified. The focus in this regard was on eliciting an underlying coherence or sense of meaning in the data (Neuman, 1997). In the next phase, the plausibility of

the understandings generated in the previous phase was explored and evaluated. This involved challenging understandings and searching for negative instances or patterns (van Vlaenderen, 1997). These were then incorporated into the larger structure where appropriate. In the final phase of the interpretative process, general theoretical significance was assigned to the findings that emerged by contextualising them within the field literature on transgenerational transmission of trauma (Neuman, 1997).

Ethical Considerations

Addressing ethical concerns is a major consideration in qualitative research. According to Knapik (2002), this is because qualitative research is underpinned by the assumption that science can never be value-free. In respect of the current study in particular, what further contributed to the importance of considering ethical imperatives was the risk that the participants might be re-traumatised through their participation. Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) remind us that the possibility of re-traumatisation applies to victims of secondary trauma too. In the first instance, ethical approval for the study was therefore obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Nova Southeastern University. Formal permission for the study was also granted by the KSG. The informed consent of the participants was gained by informing them in non-technical terms about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the research design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits arising from their participation (Kvale, 1996). They were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could terminate their participation at any stage of the study (Creswell, 1998). They were also made aware of counselling services where they could get trauma debriefing if required. In order to respect the participants' privacy and to protect their dignity and autonomy, every attempt was made to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of research material. This included using pseudonyms in the reporting of the study. At the start of each interview, I also made sure not only to establish rapport, but also to use sensitivity and, as suggested by Briere (1997), throughout the interview to monitor the participant's reactions for any indication of excessive distress. The purpose of this was to guard against possible re-traumatisation.

Findings

The interpretative analytical process yielded three salient themes descriptive of how children and grandchildren of victims of gross human rights violations during the Apartheid era perceive the violations to have affected them and still to affect them.

The themes identified are: (1) secondary traumatisation; (2) socio-economic and material impact; (3) sense of powerlessness and helplessness.

Secondary Traumatisation

The theme of secondary traumatisation was particularly strikingly expressed by Theo who claimed to have been traumatised by what happened to his father. He was six years old when his father disappeared in 1986. It was only in 1996 that the true circumstances surrounding his father's disappearance, and his ultimate fate, came to light. The fact that his father's case was prominent and still enjoyed media coverage meant that the family was often reminded of the gruesome nature of his killing. This elicited traumatic reactions that appeared to have been unexpected and for which he was not prepared.

> *They told me maybe a week earlier and … my teacher brought the subject up. So I started crying in class, and people were shocked. They didn't know what was going on, and I couldn't explain. Then I explained to my history teacher. Only then did they understand. I never thought it would affect me that badly. I was traumatised. It's better now because I'm older, but because my father's case was prominent, you hear about it sometimes on the media and you can't help but to be affected all over again … because you are reminded of what they did to him.*

Theo's reaction is perhaps testament to the view that, while one might believe oneself to be unaffected by the traumatic experiences of parents and grandparents, it is possible for transgenerational traumatic responses to be activated at a later stage. One could also argue that it highlights the significance of transgenerational trauma as a mental health issue of which the impact should not be underestimated and that is deserving of attention. In addition to this, Theo displayed an acute awareness of and concern for the potential traumatic impact that the gross human rights violations of the past would have on future generations. He is convinced that the children of victims of gross human rights violations were the ones that were affected the most.

> *We, the children, we are definitely suffering the most from it. We are traumatised … I will suffer from it maybe for the rest of my life. The impact it will have on me will last forever. Because of that there are also some psychological impacts on my life.*

For some, their own experience of trauma appeared to emanate from bearing witness to the trauma of their parents and grandparents. Grace (Theo's niece) had been exposed throughout her life to the devastating impact that the disappearance of her grandfather before she was born had had on her mother and grandmother. She was close to both of them and memories of the impact on them remained as she was growing up.

I was exposed to the sadness because we all stay together and we were close. I could not escape it. I was traumatised because they were traumatised. I remember being sad because my mother and grandmother was sad. Maybe that is why I am shy.

Like Grace, Bridget also bore witness to the traumatic impact that her uncle's death had had on her family, particularly her mother and grandmother.

It affected my grandmother … . It also affected my mother a lot. My grandmother talks, but it's traumatic, and when she talks, she cries. My mother too also cries. I saw this every day and I couldn't understand. It affected me in a bad way. You could say I am also traumatised.

In addition to explicit claims by some participants of secondary traumatisation, other participants maintained that they were emotionally and psychologically affected by the traumatic impact of the violations. For Arthur, the dominant emotional impact was that of anger.

It affects them to this day, and it makes me angry. I saw what it did to them [his grandparents and mother]*, even today, and I can't explain what it does to me, but it makes me angry.*

Bridget, however, described feelings of nothingness and emptiness.

It is difficult to put it into words. I feel sad. I feel nothing. I feel empty.

Nelson expressed with clarity and certainty the serious psychological impact that his father's experience had had on him.

In '99 I had panic attacks … panic attacks from that photo because, when I closed my eyes, I was looking at it. And the depression … then I was admitted at the hospital for three months. I had migraine headaches … . It was something like I was mad. I was taking psychiatrist medication.

It could be argued that the extent to which bearing witness would result in secondary traumatisation and emotional and psychological symptomatology in the participants is related to the level of attachment or closeness they have with the primary victims of the trauma. It also needs to be noted that intergenerational trauma is manifested not only at the emotional and psychological levels, but also at a physical level, as in the case of Nelson.

Socio-Economic and Material Impact

In addition to the emotional and psychological impact, many of the participants were also convinced that the violation had had a financial and material impact on them. In many cases, the victims had been the breadwinners whose absence compromised the ability of their families to sustain their survival. This was the case with Arthur, whose family struggled to survive after the deaths of his uncle and brother.

Maybe I would have finished school. Definitely, if he was still alive, maybe I would have something like a business. I'm sure it would have been better. If they had been alive, our lives would have been different.

Given his father's business success and the standard of living they had been able to enjoy prior to his death, Theo believed that the killing of his father was directly responsible for the socio-economic difficulties that he and his family were experiencing.

We are also not working, we are under financial constraints, and we feel that if our father was here, we wouldn't be suffering like that. We lived well when he was alive, better than most people in the community. That all changed when he disappeared. We are struggling since then.

Martin, commenting more generally, laments the fact that nothing has changed for Black people, who continue to be poor, while Whites are steadfast in their refusal to acknowledge the impact that past injustices had and continue to have on the lives of Blacks.

There are no changes in the lives of victims, so I don't see that as something you can forgive. We Black people are still poor while Whites refuse to change and admit what was done in the past was wrong.

It is therefore likely that the lives of participants and their families could have been different, at least from a socio-economic point of view, had they not suffered gross human rights violations. Furthermore, not only this, but the perceived indifference on the part of Whites to the plight of Blacks makes it difficult, if not impossible, for Blacks to engage in processes such as forgiveness that could potentially contribute to social cohesion.

Sense of Powerlessness and Helplessness

Some participants experienced a predominant sense of powerlessness and helplessness that stemmed from their inability to deal effectively with the traumatic and socio-economic impact the violations had on them and their parents and grandparents. For Monty, it was primarily

about his inability to compensate for the material impact of his brother's death on his family. He subscribed to his mother's belief that she would not have struggled had her son not been killed because he would have looked after her. He also appeared to be saddened by the belief that he could not fill his elder brother's shoes and take care of his mother. One could thus argue that his sense of powerlessness and helplessness gave rise to feelings of inadequacy/inferiority vis-à-vis his deceased brother, and possibly also guilt and shame due to his inability to fill his brother's shoes.

> *Sometimes she just cries and says "If my son was here he would help me with this and this". She is struggling and it is because of what happened to him. He was responsible and would have taken care of her. For some reasons I can't do that.*

Mary's feelings of hopelessness caused her to resign herself to the fact that what had happened was something that she could neither change nor do anything about. She entertained the idea that suffering may be a destiny from which there was no escape and that she would have to accept and learn to live with it.

> *I feel sad. I really feel sad that there's nothing that I can do. ... I wish it never happened, but I can't change the past. I have to accept it. What else can I do? Maybe we are supposed to suffer like this.*

Theresa's sense of helplessness derived from her desire to help her mother and grandmother, but not knowing how to do so.

> *She* [her mother] *is always crying when she looks at the photo. My mother doesn't talk about him anymore. It's sad, not nice. It affected my grandmother too. She was his mother.... I want to help them, but I don't know how.*

Theo's sense of powerlessness, on the other hand, was manifested in the confusion brought about by the many unanswered questions he had.

> *When I was young, I couldn't understand where my father was. I would just sometimes hope to see him maybe tomorrow, you know. But when you grow up, you start to under-stand that he is not here. Then you start asking "Where is he?" and you would do research to try to find him. You would be confused, like where could he be or what could have happened to him? It makes you feel frustrated and powerless.*

Discussion

As maintained by Eagle and Watts (2002), Apartheid undeniably traumatised Black South Africans. Volkan (2006) furthermore contends that the transgenerational transmission of trauma is a natural psychological off-shoot in circumstances where one group becomes the deliberate target of another group's aggression. This is because the official end of the political system and its traumatising elements does not necessarily spell an end to the individual and societal responses to the previously devastating political system. Rather, the trauma shared by the victimised group and their descendants may continue for decades (Volkan, 2006). The findings of the current study support these notions and suggest that being exposed to the trauma of parents and grandparents who had testified at the TRC had indeed traumatised the participants. In addition to this, Gilligan (1997) asserts that it is almost inevitable that children would bear witness to the unresolved trauma of parents who were victims of violence. According to Simpson (1998), the same would apply to grandparents, particularly in Black South African families. Burman (1996) notes that it was often grandmothers who became the primary care-givers and attachment figures to grandchildren whose parents were anti-Apartheid activists.

The findings also indicate that the transgenerational impact of parental and grandparental trauma manifests in a range of emotional and psychological symptoms considered consistent with trauma (Herman, 1992). Past studies have produced similar results. Emotional and psychological symptomatology has been identified in grandchildren of Holocaust survivors (Iliceto et al., 2011), children of Vietnam War veterans in the United States (Davidson et al., 1989; Harkness, 1993), African American descendants of slaves (Apprey, 1998), child-ren of Australian Vietnam War veterans (Davidson & Mellor, 2001), and Latino youth in the United States (Bridges, de Arellano, Rheingold, Danielson, & Silcott, 2010). McFarlane (2010) furthermore highlighted the physical morbidity associated with psychological trauma and the enduring impact of traumatic memory.

The findings of the study further indicate that gross human rights violations may have a transgenerational economic impact on the victims' families. As noted by Gibson (2004), Apartheid facilitated the enrichment of White South Africans by creating political and economic power structures that served to entrench their privilege vis-à-vis Blacks. It deprived Black people of the right to land ownership, and subjugated them into subservient and exploited labour to serve the interests of racist capitalism (Terreblanche, 2002). The unequal distribution of resources created increasing inequalities (Marais, 2001). According to Terreblanche (2002), being victims of Apartheid in general and gross human rights violations in particular resulted in the entrenchment of poverty for many Blacks. It is further suggested that a

particularly striking feature of poverty and inequality is the tendency to transmit across generations (Bird, 2007; Hall, 2012). This can be explained in terms of what is referred to as *social reproduction theory*, which holds that younger generations are likely to end up occupying an economic position similar to that of their parents due to the impact on life chances of factors such as money and power (Bowles & Gintis, 1977). In addition to this, Volkan (2006) maintains that trans-generationally transmitted trauma further gains salience from attaching itself to real-life issues such as poverty that descendants of victims are faced with. Indeed, it has been suggested that socio-economic injustices could have a traumatic impact (Mollica, 2008). In a case study on the effects of poverty in the South African township of Khayelitsha, Ndingaye (2005) makes reference to a community overwhelmed by the *trauma of poverty*. When people are denied the right to human dignity and to have their basic needs met, they are therefore likely to be traumatised. The present study produced results that were consistent with this.

Another salient theme was that participants conveyed being overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness and powerlessness. The literature supports the presence of feelings of helplessness in children of victims of gross human rights violations. Volkan (2006), for example, contends that transgenerationally transmitted trauma increases one's sense of helplessness and leads to an inability to be assertive. He notes that the children of victims are often tasked not only with doing the work of mourning pertaining to the losses suffered by the older person, but with removing the older person's sense of helplessness. Based on research with African American descendants of slaves, Apprey (1998) reaches the same conclusion. According to Volkan (1996), the child's ability to transcend a parental sense of help-lessness will largely depend on the extent to which the historical conditions that were initially responsible for the parental helplessness have improved. If this has not happened, it would result in a continued sense of powerlessness (Volkan, 1996). This highlights some of the intrapsychic aspects of the intergenerational traumatic impact that Apartheid-era gross human rights violations have on the children and grandchildren of victims of such violations, and is also consistent with the conventional psychological explanations for the effects of trauma. Yet it needs to be added that the study also pointed to other less individualistic factors that may explain the transgenerationally transmitted trauma. Indeed, Albeck (1994) has argued for greater cognisance to be taken of social, political and historical considerations. In similar vein, Buchanan (1998) has demonstrated that, as proposed by Tatara (1998), a comprehensive understanding of the intergenerational consequences of massive traumatisation is possible only through a multidimensional (e.g., psychological, cultural, socio-political, and economic) lens (Danieli, 2007, p. 71).

Limitations

Since the study involved subjecting the interview data to interpretative analyses, and given that, as Schwandt (1997) emphasises, researchers are neither value-free nor objective observers, it needs to be acknowledged that my own values, biases, and so on have inevitably influenced the research findings. The same applies to the selection of those aspects of the interview data that were deemed worthy of interpretation, as well as to the inter-pretative choices that were ultimately made (Riessman, 1993). There is therefore a need for an ongoing process of critical reflection on my part as the researcher regarding how my own experiences, values, interests, assumptions and preconceptions may have influenced the analysis and interpretation of the data (Willig, 2001). Reflexivity, as it pertains to ethical qualitative research practices, involves a process of reflecting both on *the kind of knowledge generated* and on *how that knowledge is generated* (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). It entails a willingness on the part of researchers to acknowledge their own influence, and implies a level of transparency, which is associated with quality and credibility.

The study had personal resonance for me as a third-generation descendent of a family that suffered forced removal under the *Group Areas Act* (No. 41 of 1950). The fact that my family had suffered displacement during Apartheid allowed me to identify to some extent with the participants and gave me insight into their experiences. Listening to the harrowing details of how someone's loved one was tortured or killed was at times overwhelming; it allowed me to empathise with participants and their families and reminded me of my own vulnerability. I engaged in on-going self-reflection by recording my thoughts and feelings in writing, particularly after each interview. This, as well as having regular debriefings with a colleague who is a clinical psychologist, assisted me in processing and reflecting on how my own subjectivity could influence the way I interpreted and analysed the data. Ultimately, these measures allowed me to record and present the study's findings in a way that I believe is honest and that did not compromise the study's integrity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has explored the notion of intergenerational trauma and the transgenerational transmission thereof in post-Apartheid South Africa by reporting on the findings of a qualitative study conducted with children and grandchildren of victims of Apartheid-era gross human rights violations. It highlights the cumulative impact on family members of the dynamic interplay between, on the one hand, past injustices visited upon victims of gross human rights violations and, on the other, current distressing contextual factors such as racism and poverty, and points to the potential for cumulative trauma of this nature to produce powerful

feelings of anxiety, pain, anger and confusion in the descendants of victims. Conceptually, the analysis is framed by two interrelated theoretical models, the life course perspective and historical trauma theory. It is argued that both of these provide useful insight into how the life trajectories of different generations of families emerging from a history of violence and trauma are shaped. They call our attention to the fact that the intergenerational transmission of trauma is an ongoing developmental process due to the way in which the lives of younger family members and those of their parents and grandparents are interdependently interwoven and reciprocally affected in multiple ways (Elder, 1987). The potential for past trauma to be transmitted intergenerationally can be attributed to a combination of personal factors, the developmental histories of victim families, situational constraints, and cultural and societal transformations (Litvak-Hirsch & Chaitlin, 2010).

There is much that is not known about the notion of transgenerational trauma in contemporary South Africa. This logically calls for the intensification of scientific exploration of the phenomenon in this context. Previous South African studies, including the current one, have focused on investigating the salience of the phenomenon in relation to cases of extreme victimisation during the Apartheid era. The TRC conceded that the victims of Apartheid were not only the approximately 21,300 who filed gross human rights petitions with the Commission, but the millions of Black South Africans for whom collective expulsions, forced migration, gutting, seizure or bulldozing of homes, the mandatory carrying of so-called "passes", forced removals into rural ghettos, unemployment, and increased poverty and desperation, were grim daily realities (TRC Final Report, Vol. 1, 1998). It is conceivable that the consequence of all of this was humiliation, denigration, and loss of dignity – all factors identified in the literature as characteristics of transgenerational trauma. There is, therefore, a need to explore how the phenomenon might be manifested,

if at all, in the general Black South African population as compared with cases involving Apartheid-era gross human rights violations. It has also been noted that, while children could be overwhelmed by the burden placed on them, they could also become more resilient as a result of the psychological strength and stamina that is created by living daily with traumatised parents (Wardi, 1992). It would thus be critical also to identify factors that could serve to mitigate the transgenerational transmission of trauma.

In addition to this, it would be interesting to determine the transgenerational implications that Apartheid might have for White South Africans. Related factors in the case of perpetrator groups would revolve around issues of shame and guilt. It has been said that collective shame and guilt are transmitted across generations. Referring to post-war Germany, Schwab (2010) notes that "The more the acknowledgment of shame and guilt was silenced in public debates, the more they migrated into the psyche and the cultural unconscious" (p. 71). Given the superficial manner in which the difficult legacy of Apartheid and colonialism has been engaged with, it would be relevant to focus on how this may impact on young White South Africans, particularly in relation to issues of guilt and silencing. Schwan (1998) reminds us that the silencing of guilt damages the political culture of a democracy because (1) it hinders the realisation of a vivid and motivating consensus on the common values of a polity, and (2) it damages the psyches of perpetrators as well as their children, so that it becomes difficult for them to develop the strength of personal identity necessary for good citizenship. Focusing on these issues could possibly allow for the creation of trauma discourses that will not focus on blame and anger on the one hand, and denial and defensiveness on the other, but rather trauma discourses that will help us to understand how both victim and perpetrator groups in contemporary South Africa suffer from what Schwab (2010) refers to as "psychic deformations" of our violent past.

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