

**Christine Anthonissen  
and Jan Blommaert (eds.)**

**Discourse and  
Human Rights Violations**

**BENJAMINS CURRENT TOPICS 5**



## Discourse and Human Rights Violations

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Edited by Christine Anthonissen and Jan Blommaert

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# Discourse and Human Rights Violations

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# Table of contents

About the Authors	vii
Introduction <i>Christine Anthonissen</i>	1
The debate on truth and reconciliation: A survey of literature on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission <i>Annelies Verdoolaeghe</i>	13
Narrative inequality in the TRC hearings: On the hearability of hidden transcripts <i>Jan Blommaert, Mary Bock and Kay McCormick</i>	33
Critical Discourse Analysis as an analytic tool in considering selected, prominent features of TRC testimonies <i>Christine Anthonissen</i>	65
South African Novelists and the Grand Narrative of Apartheid <i>Annie Gagiano</i>	89
Linguistic Bearings and Testimonial Practices <i>Fiona Ross</i>	101
History in the making/The making of history: The 'German <i>Wehrmacht</i> ' in collective and individual memories in Austria <i>Ruth Wodak</i>	115



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# The language of remembering and forgetting

Christine Anthonissen

## Introduction

Interest in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established before and has lasted considerably longer than the couple of years in which the Commission's hearings took place.<sup>1</sup> Academics, politicians, religious communities and ordinary lay members of society have shown interest from a variety of perspectives, such as those of people themselves affected by histories of human rights violations (cf. Jaffer 1997; Cherry 2000; Sachs 2000),<sup>2</sup> those of people interested in how communities move from violent conflict between warring groups to reconciliation (cf. Villa-Vicencio 1996; Swartz 2000; Wilson 2000), or those of people interested in how individuals move from experiences of trauma, suffering and loss to some form of closure, to a restored sense of value and meaning (cf. Winslow 1997; Govender 1998; Lyster 2000; Foster 2000).<sup>3</sup> Such interest may centre around, but is not limited to, tracing and recording the political uses of a TRC in processes of transformation from authoritarian, totalitarian government to inclusive democracy, or in coming to terms with abuses of a violent past in order to establish credible and enduring national unity.

A workshop on *The Language of Remembering and Forgetting* held in August 2001 at the University of the Western Cape recognised the interest of Linguistics and Literature (e.g. Heyns 2000), Media Studies (e.g. Jaffer 1997; Green 1998; Bird and Garda 1998; Thloloe 1998), Social Anthropology and Psychology (e.g. Robins 1998; Wilson 2000; Swartz 2000), Political Science (e.g. Adam 1997; Du Toit 1997, 1999) and History (e.g. Bundy 2000) in the processes of remembering in order to properly document, remembering in order to repair and to reconcile, remembering in order to forget,<sup>4</sup> remembering in order to be able to move on sensibly and sensitively. Organised by linguists from the Universities of the Western Cape and Cape Town, there was an obvious interest in the ways language mediates in all the different social and political processes of remembering and forgetting human rights violations.<sup>5</sup> This book has collected a number of the papers read and discussed at the workshop. For the sake of readers wanting to take this topic further

we have included introductorily an additional chapter that gives an overview of the kinds of publications spawned by the South African TRC.

The TRC, commonly also referred to as the ‘Truth Commission’, was instituted by the provisions of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 34 of 1995. The enabling legislation resulted from an intense public debate on how the government and the South African people should deal with systematic violations of internationally recognised human rights that occurred over an extended period before the eventual transition to democracy in 1994. The challenge, according to Crocker (2000: 100), was to respond “appropriately to past evils without undermining the new democracy or jeopardizing prospects for future development”. Various measures such as trials in court and judicial punishment were considered. The decision was to institute a truth commission as an investigative body that could attend to ‘transitional justice’ which would strive to afford compensatory, distributive and restorative justice as opposed to mere ‘penal justice’ offered by trials and punishment. Broadly described, the aim of the TRC was to promote “national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends conflicts and the divisions of the past” (Chapter 2 Section 3(1) of the Act). Crocker (1999, 2000) considers the goals of truth commissions and employs these goals as criteria in evaluating the TRC. Such goals include

- discerning and making public “the truth” (the issue of “one truth or many”, “forensic truth”, “hard facts” as well as “emotional truth”),
- providing a public platform for victims,
- holding perpetrators accountable and meting out appropriate sanctions, strengthening the rule of law,
- securing compensation for victims,
- providing for reforms of the law and of basic institutions to reduce the possibility of former violations being repeated,
- reconciling former enemies and reintegrating them into society, and
- extending the practice of public deliberation even where it is unlikely that full agreement will be achieved.

The 1995 legislation tasked the TRC with investigating gross violations of human rights committed between 1960 and 1994 in South Africa and, in specified cases, also beyond its borders. It was required to establish as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of such violations of human rights committed during the designated period. An Amnesty Committee heard applications for amnesty from individuals who had committed politically motivated crimes in the period under review; the Human Rights Violations Committee attended to victims and a reparation and rehabilitation committee devised recommendations

for reparation policies. The Commission had extensive powers, including those of search and seizure and of subpoena.

In April 1996, in response to a nation-wide media campaign on the part of the TRC, approximately 21 000 South Africans came forward to tell their own or their relatives' stories of violations. These stories were told first to a statement-taker.<sup>6</sup> From the initial accounts the Human Rights Violations Committee then invited a number of witnesses, whose stories had been corroborated as far as possible, to appear at the public hearings. The selection of witnesses was made on the grounds of representativeness: with respect to gender, race, age and geographical location, with respect to the kind of abuse suffered, and from communities on all sides in the conflict (TRC Report, I, 140–147). Before appearing at the public hearings, the witnesses were introduced to the Committee member who would facilitate their hearing and were given the opportunity to go over their story with them.

In the wide spectrum of TRC discourses, questions of power are rarely absent, and they are explicitly addressed in the analysis of a number of discourses generated in the TRC processes. The topic of the TRC and power relates not only to the uses and abuses of power by a previous regime and its representatives, or to the power of the new government in deciding on reparation, restoration, prosecution or amnesty. It relates also to issues of power relationships in the processes of the TRC itself.<sup>7</sup> In the following chapters there are several references to the ways in which witnesses felt more or less empowered, felt able or not to control their own experiences, histories and recording of such histories, were perceived or projected as weak, fragile and dependent, and so on. Some who suffered human rights abuses preferred not to participate in the TRC, thus not having to relinquish the power of deciding when they would tell their stories, to whom, in which circumstances and for which purposes. Others attempted to maintain control by refusing to testify or by giving minimal and carefully monitored testimonies. The same is true of many who were expected to apply for amnesty, and much has been written on why or why not perpetrators were willing to apply for amnesty and give full disclosure of their involvement in human rights abuses.<sup>8</sup>

Another, often introduced question related to power and control, refers to the issue of ownership. Who owned the TRC process? Bishop Tutu, the appointed commission, the government, the 'people'? And who owns the stories? Who has the right to retell, to re-use the stories, to reconstruct events, to analyse and interpret? A number of groups dealing with traumatised survivors have become increasingly annoyed with academic and intellectual interest in the reconciliation process. They find such interest intrusive, often hegemonic, and even more often disruptive to the actual process in which people have to come to terms with their experiences of violence and perpetuated trauma. Some actively resist being drawn

into theoretical and abstract discussions of stories and histories of human rights abuses. This confronted us with the question whether we could justify presenting an academic workshop on the verbal processes of remembering and forgetting in the TRC. What qualifies us to take up the recorded stories of pain and repression, of abuse and denial, and then in a way to turn them into objects of academic reflection? How do we answer challenging questions such as “Who are you to assume you can legitimately interpret our stories? In which way are you authorised to work with these histories?” We have to find an answer to the moral question relating to our right to be analysts in this context.

On the telling or not of stories of gross, officially sanctioned abuse the exiled Chilean writer and academic, Ariel Dorfman, remarked

“There are stories that cry out to be told and if the words aren’t there they will seep through the skin.”

Stories find their own way into a wider consciousness, and there are many agents other than those who suffered that may bring such stories to the surface.

In an interview, Antjie Krog asked Dorfman

“Isn’t it a sacrilege — to use someone else’s story, a story that has cost him his life?”

To which Dorfman answered

“Do you want the awful truth? How else would it get out? How else would the story be told?”

On the right to analyse and interpret stories of gross, officially sanctioned abuse, we do have some considered suggestions. Scholarly investigation of TRC testimonies may disclose patterns that are generalisable and can therefore be applied to other sets of circumstances. It could help with understanding the discourses of human rights abuses and discourses of the aftermath, in comparable circumstances elsewhere. Recent global events, where discourses have developed that could be considered in similar vein, would be those relating to conflict in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Israel-Palestine or India-Pakistan disputes.

The discourses generated around the South African truth commission, despite their intent to authenticate individual stories that are easily lost in the larger institutional discourses, are not unique in the genre of talking about pain, about state violence, about uncovering suppressed truths. Social and linguistic interest in discourses that “make it possible for perpetrators to be confronted by victims and the heirs of victims” (Rotberg 2000: 3) comes from many quarters. The desire to record complete accounts of brutal pasts has been registered in societies as disparate

as Argentina, Bosnia, Cambodia, Cyprus, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nigeria, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone and Kosovo (Rotberg 2000). An interest in linguistic representation of human rights abuses, of mediating questions of justice after such abuses, is equally widespread and enduring. (cf. Martin and Wodak (eds.) 2003, Dediać and Nelson (eds.) 2003, Ensink and Sauer 2003, Thiesmeyer (ed.) 2003, Chilton 2004). Human rights abuses are not limited to a particular time or place — they seem to occur again and again in spite of a regular plea for “never again!” Exactly because of this, the South African decision to reduce the amount of vagueness, inconclusiveness and lies about the past by means of a truth commission is of interest to more than merely the local community.

Critical Discourse Analysis has consistently taken an interest in discourses situated in social circumstances where power imbalance results in various forms of abuse. It has an explicit commitment to going beyond academic analysis, to addressing social injustice in such a way as to amplify the notion of “never again” in circumstances where human dignity and integrity are at stake. Recent scholarly work illustrates this, as e.g. Galasiński (2003: 228) does in a linguistic analysis of 1981 legislation in Poland that exposes the text as “an act of manipulation, an act of pretending to be what it is not”. Wodak (2003: 206), analysing anti-Semitic discourse in post-war Austria, indicates the analytic value of linguistic tools as diagnostic measures to detect offensive meanings and their impact in a variety of contexts. Chilton (2003: 95ff) uses a cognitive discourse-analytical perspective to repudiate just-war discourses that excuse and apologise for what is inexcusable. Dickason (2003: 385ff) considers whether “advertising for peace” in Northern Ireland could achieve its goals and be defended on moral grounds.

The TRC made public histories that formerly were unacknowledged; it publicly acknowledged stories that had been denied closure due to suppression of various kinds of evidence. By means of public discourses, larger communities were invited to consider new information, discomfiting perspectives, alternative readings of recent events. Analyses of the kind presented in this collection give some insight into what people were doing with their stories of humiliation, abuse and loss. They give some understanding of the constraints of context, of the effects that the public testimony setting may have on the shape and content of what is remembered or forgotten individually and collectively. The work presented in this book is an attempt at explaining why we have taken on this particular academic challenge. We can only talk in terms that are familiar to us, and give perspectives from the field which is somehow our ‘home discipline’, and we cannot just look on, look back or look forward in silence.

The first chapter in this collection is a review article of texts related to and generated by the TRC. In this chapter, Annelies Verdoolaege presents a survey of



publications that have their origin in the planning and eventual institution of a TRC in South Africa. It gives a rough categorisation of scholarly books and articles published in anticipation of the establishment of such an institution and those published after the commencement of the work of the TRC. It also categorises, according to thematic considerations that turn on the position, perspective and field of interest of the various authors. Such interests could be economic, legal, religious, political, historical, psychological, social, anthropological or linguistic. This overview should have value for further reading and research on the discourses generated by the TRC as well as on those discourses linked to the TRC by virtue of genre, topic or other specific concern.

Following is a contribution by the linguists Jan Blommaert, Mary Bock and Kay McCormick on narrative inequality in the TRC hearings. The kinds of discourses in focus in this paper are witness testimonies taken from the hearings on gross human rights violations. The authors consider a number of discursive features apparently peculiar to public recounts of suffering by witnesses who were voiceless and powerless, but whose stories became “important, relevant and instructive” due to massive and ongoing transformation in South African society. Particularly, they are interested in the perception that witnesses at TRC hearings were equally positioned in the discourses. Working with the notions of *historicity*, *intertextuality* and Scott’s *public* and *hidden transcripts* they consider ways in which discourses of power and resistance may change position, or at least appear to change position in discursive events as carefully structured as the TRC hearings.

A video-recorded testimony of a young man who got involved in active resistance at the age of 15 serves as primary data. A witness who testified to many years and countless instances of suffering at the hands of the police and who apparently remains scarred, at times attempts to construct himself as a crafty and able champion in the struggle rather than just as an incapacitated victim. How this and similar oral testimonies were constructed on the TRC stage provide material for thorough consideration of how history should not glibly be read off transcribed words.

Third is a chapter, also from a linguistic perspective, in which Christine Anthonissen refers to the witness hearings on the Trojan Horse incident as a vehicle for detecting generic properties of the discursive contributions of various participants in the TRC hearings. Using analytic tools provided by the discourse sociolinguistic approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, differences in verbal presentation of victims, perpetrators and media representatives are highlighted. There were the voices of journalists who at the time defied media restrictions and police harassment in order to bring to public attention the suspect and fatal policing methods that led to the killing of three youngsters and the injury of a great number more.

And there was the voice of a woman in whose house one of the youngsters died, who was herself shot and traumatised and whose family continues to live with the destructive effects of the event. There were also the voices of the police officers subpoenaed to testify at this particular Special Event hearing. Attention is drawn to the ways in which both witnesses and the TRC officers used techniques of rephrasing in order to present painful memories in a shape that was more tolerable for them, that could restore dignity and a sense of worth that had been severely undermined by the event itself. This technique is used by victims, perpetrators, media onlookers and commissioners alike.

Next, relating to the theme raised by the TRC, of remembering and forgetting a past in which racial prejudice distorted and devastated, Annie Gagiano traces the work of a number of South African novelists. She considers how their works become “forms of sociopolitical and psychological profiling”. This chapter articulates the presenter’s enduring interest in literature as a form of knowing, as a way into gaining knowledge and insight that more rigid human-scientific studies may fail to recognise. The chapters chosen for this occasion function as reminders of shame some would prefer to forget, as acts of commemoration where some may unjustly be forgotten and as checks and challenges to regular historiography. Gagiano reminds that the language of reconciliation, “if used in a facile rather than circumspect manner, runs the danger of promoting a forgetfulness”. Her analyses show how novelists confirm in an innovative way much of what is anticipated in the TRC legislation and in the hearings. Remembering is a threatening, even if crucial, undertaking: articulating common as well as conflictual memories in verbal art is part of the precarious process of coming to terms with the past that the TRC so specifically and structurally addressed.

Fiona Ross considers from an anthropological perspective the recall of violence to women in women’s testimonies before the Human Rights Violations Committee. She refers to the right to recount, the right to make memories known and acknowledged in a public sphere, as it was introduced by Werbner (1998). This she relates to culturally established subject positions of women, and to the propensity of women to speak about violence to others (e.g. their husbands or sons) rather than violence to themselves. This chapter attends not only to the restoration of voice and the restoration of witnesses’ dignity by allowing them to relate their own accounts of violation, but also to the limitations of language when relating pain in an institutional space that is not necessarily a safe space. Ross reflects on the decision to attend to women’s voices in Special Hearings on Women, on the requirement to be attentive to what is not said, but given in facial expression, gesture, body language. She observes the interplay between words and silence.

To balance our consideration of South African TRC hearings with consideration of processes of recall of human rights violations elsewhere, Ruth Wodak reports on some of her research at the Austrian Academy of Science's Wittgenstein Research Centre: Discourse, Politics, Identity. Her chapter reports on the collective and individual memories of Austrians in the German '*Wehrmacht*' as these were articulated at a photographic exhibition that was, after some controversy, brought to Vienna in 2002. This research takes a broad interest in how democratic and pluralist societies handle traumatic experiences, and how recollection and memory contribute to the making of history. Using the interdisciplinary approach associated with the discourse-historical method of Critical Discourse Analysis, Wodak refers to the work of scholars such as Halbwachs (1967) and Ricoeur (1998) that indicate people do not remember alone, but in recall draw on the memories of others as well.

The chapter reports on the way in which three different generations respond to images of war atrocities that implicate either themselves or members of their families as being part of the perpetrating groups. The legitimating discourses almost spontaneously develop as family discourses showing personal involvement in the exhibited images. They offer data that could fruitfully be compared to some of the legitimating discourses that were heard at TRC hearings, mostly when perpetrators were questioned, either when they were subpoenaed to testify or in their applications for amnesty. Some of the hearings where special interest groups such as political parties, the business community or religious communities testified, also exhibit features of legitimation and justification discourses. Thus, there appear to be genres that occur repeatedly in communities where state violence and repression is under investigation. Such genres have characteristic patterns that with proper investigation may enrich our understanding of the linguistic phenomena associated with public testimonies, and perhaps also assist in developing strategies to counter hegemonic discourses in such domains more effectively.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that the workshop held at UWC presented more than just a collection of papers considering some of the ways in which language functions in the process of mediating reconciliation, amnesty and restitution through the TRC. To start with, Lindy Wilson shared her experience of making a documentary film on one of the TRC special events, the Gugulethu Seven, with participants. Lyn Smuts and Peggy Delpont exhibited artworks that give visual expression to stories of alienation and reconciliation. Mary Burton, one of the TRC Commissioners, gave her own impressions of the value that the TRC process had, on what has been achieved and what remains to be attended to in ongoing confrontation between best intentions and imperfect realities. Papers not published here that added to the interdisciplinarity and interesting scope of our

deliberations, were presented by Paul Haupt, a researcher at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Michelle Parlevliet, a researcher at the Centre for Conflict Resolution, Lesley Swartz of the Department of Psychology, University of Stellenbosch and Hugo van der Merwe, affiliated to the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

Remembering again words spoken by Dorfman on what truth commissions can achieve, we offer this collection of chapters, as a contribution to bringing to the surface what might otherwise remain submerged:

“Truth commissions are important. The structures of transition around the world come out of negotiation with the powers that were here before. Truth commissions are able to establish certain truths in a public way, to become part of official history. The previous regime lived by telling this falsity: ‘This never happened to you.’ So it must be established, by somebody representative of the society, that these things did happen.

... Something submerged will always come up, like the bodies come out of the river in Widows. They come from the imagination, from the past, from the human soul. They come from the bad conscience of the military, they are conjured up from the mind, from history which says ‘do not forget’. And until we have put them to rest, have buried them well, we cannot solve the problem.”<sup>9</sup>

We would hope that scholarly reflection on the wealth of discourses produced in the various TRC processes will continue. This book testifies to an interest in how language mediates memory<sup>10</sup> and is dedicated to processes in South Africa and elsewhere that are intent on reminding and commemorating, on sparking creative thought and on reconstructing the ways people manage difference and conflict of great sensitivity on a national scale.

Christine Anthonissen  
September 2004

## Notes

1. In 2004, ten years after the introduction of an encompassing democracy in South Africa and eight years since the first TRC hearings, there are still regular public debates (cf. discourses on the awarding of a token sum of R30 000 per ‘victim’ as restitution, or on trials for those who were not granted amnesty) and new publications considering pertinent issues that arise from the TRC processes (cf. Krog 2004, Groenewald 2004, Edelstein 2001).
2. Many who suffered violence and victimisation at the hands of former security force members did not take part in the TRC processes to tell only their own stories; often their contributions were on issues very indirectly related to their personal experiences.

3. The distinction between individual and community processes is, for the obvious reason of their connectedness, not specifically addressed or maintained in many publications.
4. Cf. B. Hamber. 1998. "Remembering to Forget: issues to consider when establishing structures for dealing with the past". <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/home/publication/research/dwtp/hamber2.pdf>.
5. Other fields that are not specifically addressed in this issue, and that have specifically topicalised the TRC in a manner which would interest CDA analysts, include economics (cf. Natrass 1999, Terreblanche 2000), law (Corder 2000, Goldstone 2000) and religion (De Gruchy 1997, Kekana 1999, Botman and Petersen 1996).
6. Unfortunately, the initial statements were recorded only as answers to questions on a protocol form so the version of the stories as initially told to the TRC is lost.
7. Cf. Winslow (1997) that addresses some of the questions relating to choices of participating in the TRC process or not, about ownership and control over experiences and the stories thereof.
8. Notoriously, the State President of the 1980s, Mr PW Botha, refused to testify even when he was subpoenaed. Cf. a recount of this and comment in Krog (1998: 265–271) and Tutu (1999: 198–202).
9. Dorfman in an interview with Carlos Reyes and Maggie Paterson: [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/journal\\_july97/carlos.html](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/journal_july97/carlos.html)
10. A recently published collection that shares this interest and merits being mentioned here is a collection of papers edited by Chris van der Merwe and Rolf Wolfswinkel, titled *Telling Wounds. Narrative, Trauma, and Memory: Working through the Southern African Armed Conflicts of the 20th Century* (2002).

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# **The debate on truth and reconciliation**

## **A survey of literature on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

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This chapter gives an overview of a large part of contemporary TRC literature. Hundreds of publications have appeared on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. With a view to proper academic reflection it would be useful to classify this literature. Various classificatory criteria could be used. In this text a topical perspective is taken, so the TRC literature is subdivided on the basis of the thematic focus of the author. Perspectives on the SA Truth Commission have many different thematic interests, such as legal, religious, political, psychological, anthropological and linguistic. This chapter tries to bring some cohesion and meaningful organization to this multitude of books, articles and dissertations. Within each thematic category representative examples are pointed out. Finally, reference is made to some lacunae and overlaps which are evident from looking at the body of TRC literature. As a result, this chapter can be seen as an investigation into the characterizing features of the debate on the TRC.

### **Introduction**

The writing of literature about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (TRC) did not start with the actual institution of the TRC in April 1996. Speculations on how South Africa would deal with its apartheid past were already expressed during the transition period from 1990 onwards. However, it was especially the negotiations about the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 34 of 1995 that gave rise to a vast body of anticipatory literature. This literature expanded during the proceedings of the TRC, and increased dramatically in volume around the time the Final Report was handed over to President Mandela in October 1998. Since then, the number of popular articles on the TRC has decreased, but that has not been the case for academic publications. Scholars



continue to reflect on the TRC, which has led to a number of very interesting and critical publications.

The flow of articles and books on the TRC is an on-going process. Within this body of literature, certain patterns and developments are discernable, as well as a number of overlaps and gaps. This chapter will give an overview of the dominant themes within TRC literature, and it will highlight some representative examples within these themes. The TRC itself will not be further introduced; other authors in this collection provide the reader with the necessary background information. It is important to bear in mind that this discussion of publications that thematise the TRC does not claim to be exhaustive — the reference date is the 1st of September 2003. Different reflections on the TRC will continue to appear, and it is very likely that South African society will develop and articulate perspectives on the TRC for many more generations to come. In addition, this chapter will mainly focus on academic publications. During the proceedings of the TRC, an enormous amount of newspaper articles were written; this type of literature will only be dealt with scantily. Finally, the publications mentioned in this chapter are the result of personal research of the author of the article. As a result, the bibliography is not an empty list of titles: all of the articles, books and papers have been read, summarized and reflected upon. This explains why the bibliography is shorter than may be expected. Nevertheless, what is gained is an extensive and much more reliable covering of the works that are discussed. My aim here is not to evaluate the publications; the works will merely be subdivided, classified and discussed as objectively as possible. In this way, the chapter intends to provide a useful starting point for researchers on the TRC or for people who would like to extend their knowledge on this fascinating aspect of South African history.

### **An introduction to the TRC Literature**

The whole TRC process sparked off a huge amount of reflection, controversy and criticism, by people from all over the world and from different social, ideological, racial or political backgrounds. These ideas were expressed in newspapers, academic articles and books, or during lectures and debates. This body of literature could be classified in a number of ways, e.g. according to the author's political affiliation or country of origin, or according to the date of publication, which could indicate what aspects were generally in issue at that particular time. Alternatively, the publications could be subdivided on the basis of their content or topical specification. In this chapter, publications will be dealt with in such a thematic way. First, however, a distinction will be made between literature produced before and

after the formal instituting of the TRC. The publications produced before mostly take the form of speculations and predictions about the future TRC process or about the proposed and eventually accepted TRC Bill. The cut off date taken here is 16 April 1996, which is the date of the first public hearings of the Human Rights Violations Committee. This is the day on which the TRC process moved from preparation into action, thus it marks the moment on which the wider population was confronted with more than just procedural reflection. The community at large was at this point obliged to reflecting on recounts of real experiences of a very large number of South African citizens from a wide range of different backgrounds. All literature published before 16 April 1996 will be considered pre-TRC literature. Literature produced after the actual start of the Commission's public hearings will then be classified according to thematic approach. Finally, some major trends and lacunae will be indicated. It needs to be pointed out that the range of topics is too vast and varied to discuss them all in a single chapter; therefore, only a number of the most prominent themes will be considered here. Less dominant themes such as the relationship between the TRC and the media, psychological reflections on the Commission, or the link between the TRC and creative arts will not be discussed here.

### Pre-TRC literature

In preparation of the TRC, the Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa (Idasa) set up a project titled *Justice in Transition*. As part of that project Idasa held two conferences in Cape Town, one in February and one in July of 1994. The one in February on "Justice in Transition: Dealing with the Past" was attended by participants from countries such as Argentina, Germany and Chile who shared their experiences of dealing with a painful past. The conference in July on "The Healing of a Nation?" continued to reflect upon ways to confront the apartheid past. National and international voices expressed their views on a proposed truth commission, conveying either concerns or encouragement and creative suggestions. These conferences resulted in publications, the first edited by Alex Boraine and Janet Levy (1995) and the second by Boraine, Levy and Ronel Scheffer (1997).

In "Dealing with the Past", the first chapter asks why dealing with the past is at all necessary. Speakers from South Africa, Chile and Eastern Europe explain that the past had to be confronted, i.a. to restore the dignity of the victims, to avoid repetition of atrocities and to establish a rule of law. The second chapter relates personal experiences of people under apartheid and stresses that many black people

deserve apologies and official acknowledgement from the white community. In a later chapter, people from South America, Eastern Europe and Germany address questions of amnesty, prosecution and reconciliation. These papers introduce interesting controversies about whether or not perpetrators have to be punished and about individual versus state responsibility.

In “Healing of a Nation?”, the publication of the second conference’s proceedings, the majority of participants are South Africans. After the keynote speech by the Minister of Justice Dullah Omar, a number of speakers reiterate that a truth commission would be crucial for the future of South Africa. The difficult task of the Commission is underscored by reference to some controversial elements such as the limitations of the TRC mandate and the definitions of truth, reconciliation, victim and perpetrator adopted by the TRC. Nevertheless, the conclusion is that a truth and reconciliation commission is indispensable for realizing national unity and reconciliation in South Africa.

In addition to these two books, a number of articles reflect on the future TRC. First of all, the voting on the TRC Bill, which predated the TRC Act, resulted in some critical publications (Van Zyl 1995; FXI 1995). In these articles especially the suggestion that the TRC hearings should be held behind closed doors, as the Bill proposed, was received negatively. Also after the voting on the Act by parliament some pre-TRC articles were very critical of what was then envisaged. They asked questions about the possibility of disclosing *the truth*, about the responsibilities of the commissioners and about the problems related to reparation (Liebenberg 1996; Lovell 1996). Others were supportive (Du Toit 1995; Miller 1995) for example in stressing the necessity of truth for the healing of the nation, or in drawing attention to the kind of restorative justice the TRC would bring. Many articles were merely descriptive, giving advice or explaining principles and definitions that would be used by the TRC (Minnaar 1995; Newham 1995; Pienaar 1995; Hamber 1997).

### **TRC literature: Chronological accounts**

Almost immediately after the TRC started with public hearings, some people directly involved with the Commission began to write about their experiences. A number of TRC Commissioners published their impressions of the TRC process. Most of these books took the form of chronological accounts. One of the first chronological accounts of the TRC was “No Future Without Forgiveness” written by the chairperson, bishop Desmond Tutu (1999). He starts off by explaining why South Africa opted for a truth commission instead of for criminal trials or

blanket amnesty. He stresses that the TRC brought justice for the victims, not only through the perpetrators' public confessions, but also through the recommendation of reparations. By giving extracts from the hearings, the chairperson points both at some remarkable examples of reconciliation and at examples of extreme human evilness. Tutu concludes that remembering the past is crucial for dealing with the past, and that the South African TRC can serve as an example for dealing with traumatic conflicts elsewhere in the world. Besides, the TRC convinced him that although humans have capacity for evil, hope, reconciliation and peace — the spirit of ubuntu — will always prevail.

With "A Country Unmasked" Deputy Chairman Alex Boraine (2000) wrote another chronological account of the TRC proceedings. Unlike Tutu, he gives more factual details when describing different stages of the TRC process. He refutes certain criticisms of the TRC and gives explanations of the political party hearings and the institutional hearings. Boraine gives an exposition of different responses to the TRC Report and questions the extent to which South African society has become reconciled. In his conclusion, the author stresses the value of the South African TRC as an international example, a remarkable solution to deal with a terrible past.

Piet Meiring is another commissioner who wrote a chronological account of the TRC, "Chronicle of the Truth Commission" (1999). He is more critical than Tutu and Boraine, for example when he states that the TRC did not succeed in revealing the complete apartheid past, and that the Commission had been unable to achieve the desired reconciliation in South Africa. The author argues that although the TRC was not flawless, it was rewarding for the amnesty applicants and healing for some victims.

In her very personal narrative "From Biko to Basson", Commissioner Wendy Orr (2000) approaches the TRC from a perspective of incisive criticism. She does not hesitate to mention controversies and conflicts within the TRC itself: her own conviction of nepotism, racism among the TRC staff and the failures of the Amnesty Committee. For her, the worst experiences came towards the end of the TRC proceedings when the commissioners had to make victim findings — decide whether a person could be found a victim of gross human rights violations and what this violation consisted of —, when they had to discuss reparations and when they had to compose the Final Report. All of this involved a great deal of dispute and prejudice, leaving her with a negative impression of the TRC in general. In "Jakaranda Time", Zenzile Khoisan (2001), a member of the TRC Investigation Unit, gives a similar account of the TRC. He describes the achievements and the difficulties of the Investigation Unit and talks about a number of specific hearings. He deals with some bad relationships between white and black TRC staff members

and stresses difficulties experienced with media contact. Khoisan mentions that the pressure was often too high, while time and resources were too scarce — in a way he feels the TRC destroyed part of his personal life.

Another chronological account worth mentioning is one written by Martin Meredith (1999), “Coming to Terms, South Africa’s Search for Truth”. Meredith was not a direct participant of the TRC, but a former journalist and later independent author and commentator. By dealing with different aspects of the apartheid regime’s secret suppression of political dissidence represented in histories such as those of Vlakplaas, Operation Marion, and police custody, he explains how little truth was established by the TRC. He is critical of the revelations of the liberation movement, doubting the testimonies of the PAC and of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. The author does agree that the TRC amnesty process revealed some truth, but he argues that a lot of work still needs to be done on the level of national unity and reparations.

Another chronological account was “Unfinished business, South Africa: Apartheid and Truth”, written by Terry Bell and Dumisa Ntsebeza (2001), the former a freelance writer and editor and the latter the head of the TRC Investigation Unit. This book consists of three parts and only the third one actually deals directly with the TRC. The bottom line of this work is that the TRC did not definitely reveal the full truth about the apartheid past. A lot of attention is paid to conflicts among the TRC staff, especially with regard to Dumisa Ntsebeza.

The most recent chronological account published is “Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa, miracle or model?” by Graybill (2002), an independent American scholar. In this book the author provides a very comprehensive overview of the available knowledge on the Commission. The book deals with a large amount of information and includes an extensive bibliography, a chronology, a glossary and a list of acronyms. Graybill pays a lot of attention to the religious aspects of the TRC and mainly concentrates on the way the USA perceived the TRC process.

The only book on the TRC written in French is “Apartheid, l’aveu et le pardon” by the French journalist Sophie Pons (2000). While writing a chronological account of the TRC, the author clearly refers to what she recognizes as some shortcomings of the Commission as well. She deals with a number of important cases that were brought before the TRC: the stories of Michael Lapsley, Eugene De Kock, PW Botha, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Wouter Basson, etc. Pons explains that the TRC had a healing effect for some of these people, such as Father Lapsley, but that many disappointments, frustrations and lies were revealed as well.

At the time of writing, the publication of chronological accounts seems to have come to an end. This is understandable; the more time lapses since the finalization

of the TRC, the more the process will be reflected upon and evaluated instead of merely being described.

### **TRC literature: Religious perspectives**

Some authors approached the TRC from a specific religious point of view. The publication "To Remember and to Heal" by Botman and Petersen (1998) collects a number of such works. Especially the contributions by Lapsley, Petersen, Kistner, Smit and Du Toit stress the importance of reconciliation and forgiveness from a Christian perspective. Other authors in this collection point to the fact that long before the TRC, 'forgiveness' and 'reconciliation' have been central concepts in many churches, and that in future the same churches need to take the initiative regarding ongoing reconciliation processes in South Africa (Botman, Du Toit and Villa-Vicencio).

Another book that takes a religious perspective is "Facing the Truth", edited by Cochrane, De Gruchy and Martin (1999). In this work special attention is given to the faith hearings. Some contributors find it a pity that not all of the religious communities testified before the TRC. They do however comment favorably on the way some religious communities accepted responsibility for past injustices and even apologized. Some contributions in this book are critical of what was achieved when indicating that the TRC is only an inadequate instrument to achieve truth and national reconciliation, for instance because it did not consider the structural aspects of apartheid (Maluleke). Many of them emphasize the particular liability of faith communities concerning future reconciliation and national unity (Chidester, Cochrane and Majiza).

In his work "The Difficult Traverse", Bernard Connor (1998) also approaches the TRC from a religious point of view. He dwells on religious definitions of reconciliation and claims that it is easier for Christians to face the truth and to accept the TRC than for non-believers. He sees the TRC as an important tool to achieve reconciliation, as it enhances a culture of debate and respect among people, which are crucial elements when working towards a reconciled society. Connor is in favor of the restorative justice model the TRC stands for, and admits that people need symbols and ceremonies like the TRC to help them to forgive.

In "Truth and Reconciliation", VanZanten Gallagher (2002) pays attention to the confessional mode in South Africa; she takes the discourse created at the TRC as a prototypical form of this confessional mode. The author first gives a theoretical reflection on the distinction between religious and judicial confession; she then discusses the confessional mode in South Africa under apartheid and in the

post-apartheid era. VanZanten Gallagher concludes that this kind of discourse can facilitate the building of communities and the creation of healthy group identities because it is based on morality, non-violence and grace.

A number of other authors topicalize the relation between religion and the TRC process or religious initiatives that have to continue the work started by the Commission (De Grunchy 1997; Maluleke 1997; Gerloff 1998; Millward 1998; Rickard 1998; Kekana 1999; Kistner 1999; Meiring 2000). Many scholars make an explicit issue of the Christian duty to forgive, and they anticipate that Christians should find it easier than non-Christians to reconcile with former enemies (Van der Walt and Van der Walt 1996; Dunn 1998; Jones 1998; Lapsley 1998; Van Zanten 1998; Moosa 2000).

### **TRC literature: Theoretical perspectives**

Another group of publications is the group dealing with the TRC theoretically. With this I mean books and articles that reflect on the phenomenon of truth commissions in a general and abstract way; they discuss abstract concepts related to a TRC process, compare truth commissions and are often philosophically oriented. An important work in this respect is “Unspeakable truths” by Hayner (2000). Hayner defines a truth commission, points to the objectives and talks about characteristics that can be interpreted as either favorable or disadvantageous for certain communities. She explains that truth commissions have to deal with a lot of practical problems — their leaders, their funding, the time frame — and that they often need support from the international community. The author concludes that truth commissions are popular nowadays because they offer adequate solutions to problems faced by societies in transition.

“Refiguring the Archive”, by Carolyn Hamilton et al. (2002), is a collection of papers that takes a theoretical perspective on various methods used to archive the past, such as the TRC process. Some of the authors talk about the philosophical and social characteristics of the archive (Mbembe, Peterson, Roberts and Van Zyl); others illustrate ways to construct an archive, both in South Africa and in other Southern African countries (Bearman, Hayes, Hamilton, Mpe, Silvester and Hartmann). A number of contributions also address the TRC as an archive (Derrida, Harris and Harris). The ‘archive’ is used metaphorically by these authors, in the sense that the TRC brought data to the surface that could then be archived in the form of recordings, written reports, kept in libraries, museums, state archives, etc.

“Between Vengeance and Forgiveness. Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence” by Minow (1998) deals with theoretical aspects of the South African TRC. She explains why the TRC was the best way to deal with the recent South African past, as it opted for acknowledgement and remembrance instead of vengeance or forgiveness. She finds a truth commission definitely a better option than a criminal tribunal, especially because a truth commission enhances the humanity and dignity of the victims. According to Minow, the TRC is likely to bring a certain degree of truth, justice and healing, although other aspects like repentance, apologizing and reparations cannot be neglected.

“Truth versus Justice” edited by Rotberg and Thompson (2000) talks about the morality of truth commissions in a very extensive way. Many positive aspects of the TRC are highlighted here: the fact that it has led to a democratic culture of reciprocity and debate (Gutman and Thompson, Maier), the fact that it turned a barbaric society into a civilized one and restored confidence in the rule of law (Bhargava), the fact that it was a good starting point for reconciliation as a process (Villa-Vicencio and Verwoerd) and the fact that it was ideal for the specific South African context (Levinson). Throughout this volume the positive characteristics of restorative versus retributive justice are stressed (Du Toit, Minow, Ntsebeza, Kiss), and some unique aspects of the TRC — especially the amnesty process — are elaborated on (Boraine, Greenaway, Slye).

In their publication, “Reconciliation Through Truth”, Asmal, Asmal and Roberts (1997) give some theoretical justifications of the TRC. The starting point of this book is that the past has to be addressed in order to create a reconciled and united society. By confronting the reader with the apartheid past, the authors point at some aspects and objectives of the TRC. They are convinced that the TRC has the duty to decriminalize the liberation struggle and to acknowledge the morality and the humanity of this resistance. Equality before the law has to be established, and socio-economic problems and violence have to be addressed. According to the authors, the final task of the TRC is to show that the freedom struggle was justified.

The theoretical concept of forgiveness with regard to South Africa is dealt with extensively by Frost’s “Struggling to Forgive, Nelson Mandela and South Africa’s Search for Reconciliation” (1998). He explains how important charismatic personalities like Mandela and Tutu are for the reconciliation process. According to him, forgiveness cannot be separated from remembrance, repentance and restitution. Frost assumes that the TRC will bring about justice and healing although real reconciliation will be a difficult and painful process. Hay is another author reflecting on reconciliation in his book “Ukubuyisana. Reconciliation in South Africa” (1998). He deals with definitions, conditions and restrictions of the concept



in great depth — especially on a social and religious level — and concludes that the TRC will bring about national reconciliation. Also Ignatieff's "The Warrior's Honor, Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience" (1998) is rather hopeful about the future of South Africa. The author is critical by saying that a truth commission can never establish a shared and absolute truth. Neither will it be able to change behavior or institutions. A truth commission can, however, influence public discourse and public memory and in this way it can establish national unity.

Also Christie (2000) talks about the TRC in a theoretical way. In his work "The South African Truth Commission" he explains the uniqueness of the TRC and tells about its coming into existence through negotiations. The author argues that the TRC will not only contribute to nation building, but will also introduce reconciliation in society. He is critical about the achievements of the amnesty process, suggesting that this process had probably been manipulated by a number of people. His final conclusion is positive: the TRC was necessary in South Africa because it gave a voice to the victims and revealed apartheid atrocities.

Quite a number of publications are very outspoken about the positive aspects of restorative justice. These publications also belong to this category of theoretical literature on the TRC. The TRC is often considered as an ideal example of restorative justice (Storey 1997; Carnegie Council 1999; Llewellyn 1999; Llewellyn and Howse 1999; Van Zyl 1999; Van Zyl 2000; Villa-Vicencio 2000). The determining feature of this kind of justice is that it does not aim to achieve individual satisfaction or compensation, but to establish equality, humanity and respect among members of a society. Restorative justice is about restoring victims, offenders and communities, and for this reason is very well suited to address issues of justice in transitional contexts. Especially because of these features of restorative justice, many scholars are convinced that the TRC brought justice to the victims (Godobo-Madikizela 1997; Allen 1999; Chapman 1999; Duvenage 1999; Ndebele 1999; Rakate 1999; Allen 2001). Not only was the TRC an effort to pay tribute to the victims, justice was also achieved through the perpetrators' shame in public exposure and through the reparation policy (Ndebele 1999; McGregor 2001).

### **TRC literature: Human rights/legal perspectives**

The conditional granting of amnesty was an inherent aspect of the TRC. However, this amnesty process was subjected to a very controversial debate. Quite a number of authors reflect on the TRC amnesty process, often from a legal or human rights perspective. Many authors are in favor of the amnesty process and see it as

a unique feature of the TRC (Verwoerd 1996; Werle 1996; Dugard 1998; Theissen 1998; Slye 1999; Slye 2000; Bennun 2003, Boraine 2003).

Others reject the amnesty procedure, for example by claiming that the South African amnesty procedure was contradictory to international regulations (Bronkhorst 1996; Manda 1996; Martin 1999). The international community labeled apartheid as 'a crime against humanity', and according to international human rights law, perpetrators of such crimes should not be granted amnesty. These authors argue that genocides and crimes against humanity have to be punished, and no state has the right to deviate from this rule. They sometimes refer to Amnesty International, an organization that did not agree with the amnesty process of the TRC. Some authors also claim that the amnesty procedure was unconstitutional (Manda 1996; Biko 2000). The South African Constitution states, indeed, that every citizen has the right to seek recourse in a court of law when she or he feels wronged. Based on this constitutional right, some families of apartheid victims challenged the amnesty principle of the TRC before court. The Constitutional Court decided against them, on the premises that this conditional amnesty was justified because of the exceptional circumstances in South Africa's transitional period.

Another group of authors reject amnesty on personal grounds. They claim that this principle robbed the victims of any sense of justice because perpetrators went free, without any moral or material compensation for the victims (Mabry 1997; Du Preez 1999). Certain critics point out that some victims saw the amnesty process as perpetrator-friendly, and this for a number of reasons. Victims were often not convinced that perpetrators really spoke the truth. To others it was not clear on what grounds amnesty was granted. Yet others noted that the reparation policy did not come into effect right away (Lyster 2000; Pigou 2003). In his book "No One to Blame? In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa", Bizo (1998) gives examples of amnesty hearings in which the truth was definitely not revealed. He argues that in such cases it was very hard for the victims to swallow amnesty. As a result of that, Bizo claims, amnesty has not led to personal reconciliation, but in many cases to bitterness and frustration.

Mahmood Mamdani (1998) is also convinced that the amnesty process did not bring about personal justice. The fact is that the amnesty hearings focused on individual perpetrators. In this way, the structural evil of apartheid as a system was neglected in favor of the misdeeds committed by some individuals. Mamdani stresses that only a limited number of victims were taken care of by the TRC — only victims of gross human rights violations as defined in the TRC Act.

The recently published collection "The Provocations of Amnesty: Memory, Justice and Impunity", edited by Villa-Vicencio and Doxtader (2003), gives a very

exhaustive overview of the different aspects of the amnesty process. The concept of 'amnesty' is considered by a large number of scholars who discuss the advantages and the disadvantages of the TRC amnesty process for the future of South Africa. The relations between amnesty, nation building, justice and truth are reflected upon, and in this way both the personal and the legal elements of amnesty are dealt with.

### **TRC literature: Social perspectives**

For many South Africans, especially victims, the TRC contained two main elements on a socio-personal level, namely the revelation of the truth and the provision of reparations.

These issues were dealt with elaborately by different authors. I will concentrate on each of these successively. One of the publications which is very critical on the quality of truth revealed by the TRC is Jefferey's "The Truth about the Truth Commission" (2001). The author's main concern is that the TRC notion of truth is a subjective one because the testimonies were not factual and objective. In many cases, Jefferey argues, victims only told their personal experiences, and these stories were not corroborated nor checked for their truthfulness. Also the testimonies of amnesty applicants were full of gossip, hearsay, lies and contradictions. Jefferey is thus convinced that a criminal court would have had more success in revealing the truth.

Although the TRC has exposed many apartheid secrets, in a large number of cases the Commission was unable to answer questions of the victims' families. These people were often not really interested in facts and descriptions, as much as in motivations and reasons for human rights violations (Cose 1998; Posel 1999). Other justifications for the impression that the TRC has revealed no more than partial truth have to do with the unreliable testimonies of many high ranking officials (Braude 1996; Dunn 1997; Stanley 2000) and with the restricted mandate of the TRC (Adam and Adam 2000; Bundy 2000; Mamdani 2000; Villa-Vicencio 2000). Besides, a lot of scholars dispute the idea that truth is a commodity that can be discovered; rather, it has to be constructed on the basis of individual experiences (Adam 1997; Henderson 2000; Bonner and Nieftagodien 2002; Morel 2002; Van der Merwe 2002).

The other issue important for people's personal satisfaction regarding the TRC process was connected to the reparations policy of the Commission. These reparations were understood to be material compensation for the victims, which would weigh up against the amnesty granted to the perpetrators. A majority of authors is

indeed convinced that reconciliation and national unity will never be possible in South Africa without redressing the socio-economic inequalities (Botman 1997; Simpson 1997; Meister 1998; Shillinger 1998; Schulre 1999; Burton 2000; Gerwel 2000; Ndungane 2000; Orr 2000; Terreblanche 2000; Wilson 2000, Bizos 2003; Villa-Vicencio 2003). In the TRC Act, provisions were made to address these inequalities. The Act mandated the TRC to "... restore the human and civic dignity of ... victims ... by recommending reparation measures in respect of them". Reparations were defined as including "any form of compensation, ex gratia payment, restitution, rehabilitation or recognition" (Orr 2000: 239). The first problem inherent in the reparation regulations was that these reparations could only be *recommended* to the government by the TRC — they were not brought into effect immediately. The second problem was that the government was not very responsive when it came to establishing an effective reparations policy. Some authors are highly critical about the reparation policy of the government. They argue that the government has a moral and political duty to bring the recommendations of the TRC into effect. However, there does not seem to be a political will to do so (Hamber 1999; Streek 1999; Colvin 2000; Hamber 2000; Jenkins 2000; Lapsley 2000; McGreal 2000). Some authors shift the responsibility from the government to the perpetrators for making real efforts towards building a new society. They stress that reaching out individually from perpetrator to victim is very important in order to reconcile (Zehr 1997; Conrad 1998; Stauffer and Hamber 1998; Llewellyn 1999; Ramphele 2000; Cronin 2001; Webster 2001; Ntsebeza 2003).

### TRC literature: Political perspectives

The idea of establishing a truth commission took form during the negotiation talks between the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party (NP) preceding the 1994 general elections. Some members of the NP were in favor of blanket amnesty, while some ANC members wanted criminal trials for apartheid perpetrators. The amnesty-for-truth exchange of the TRC was the deal that brought a breakthrough. One of the objections sometimes expressed with regard to the TRC is that the Commission was the result of a purely political compromise. Wilson (2001) deals a lot with this issue in his work "The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa". He claims that the TRC was based on a very pragmatic political compromise, solely set up to achieve national unity and to establish a human rights culture. Wilson is convinced that the TRC was an example of *realpolitik*, for example because the Commission was very 'soft' on certain political parties.

In “The South African Truth Commission: The Politics of Reconciliation”, Dorothy Shea (2000) also talks a lot about the politics behind the TRC. According to her, the TRC was politicized through the selection of commissioners, through the amnesty process and through the controversies on reparations and prosecutions. The publication of the Final Report went hand in hand with a lot of political struggle. Shea stresses that the TRC did offer a platform for victims. In addition, it achieved a limited degree of individual reconciliation. However, the expectations of what the TRC could achieve were definitely too high, and much of its value will eventually depend on the reactions of the future government. Other authors claim that this political compromise might have served the nation as a whole, although it did not sufficiently take into account the emotions of individual victims. The result was an unequal deal, justified by pragmatic considerations like convenience and nation building. The fact that the TRC did not use its power to subpoena certain key figures was yet another part of this political deal (Manda 1996; Dunn 1997; Hamber 1998; Howe 1998; Henderson 1999).

Politically oriented as well are the publications that concentrate on the relationship between the TRC and the ANC. Most of these authors are fairly critical about the nature of this relationship (Matloff 1996; McGregor 2001). Especially the fact that the ANC did not accept the Final Report is seen as bad for the image of the Party and for the future of South Africa (Gevisser 1998; Cherry 2000). It was claimed that the TRC did not fully investigate ANC crimes in other African countries and abroad, and that the TRC established a view on the past that was biased in favor of the ANC (Seremane 1997; Giliomee in Robbins 1998). Along the same lines is the book by Dan Roodt (2000), who sees the Commission as one-sided, biased and prejudiced against white South Africans.

### **TRC literature: Anthropological perspectives**

Only a few authors have taken an anthropological point of view when reflecting on the TRC.

The very first author to express this perspective was Antjie Krog (1998) with “Country of My Skull”. Krog was not a commissioner, but because she worked intensively on the Commission as a journalist, she was able to give a very personal account.

With this book Krog really captures the dramatic essence of the Commission. She relies mainly on extracts from some very emotional hearings, and in this way she focuses explicitly on the humanity of the individual witnesses. Krog also gives a lot of personal reflections, which make the book extremely gripping. The author

argues that it will be impossible for the Commission to ever construct a common memory based on such a huge diversity of experiences. She is disappointed by the lack of participation of whites and of politicians in general, and she refers to the fact that repentance and reparation are crucial for forgiveness. Her overall conclusion, though, is hopeful: the TRC has broken the silence about the past and has shown the way to a culture of human rights and national unity.

Another publication, "Bearing Witness", by Fiona Ross (2003) looks at the TRC from an ethnographic perspective. Ross does not try to give a general overview of the Commission's proceedings, nor is there an attempt to evaluate the TRC. Instead, the author focuses on one particular aspect of the TRC, namely on women who testified before the Human Rights Violations Committee. The testimonies of the women before the Commission are compared to the stories these women told in their interviews with the author. By doing this, Ross questions how the discourse, grammar and definitions used by the Commission permitted the expression of certain truths while it obscured others.

A number of contributors in the collection "Commissioning the Past" edited by Posel and Simpson (2002) also take an anthropological perspective when looking at the TRC. In the second part of this book we get three victim stories (by Dube, Pigou and Matshoba). The authors of these articles quote at length from the victims' testimonies and talk about the expectations and perceptions of the victims regarding the TRC process.

### **TRC literature: Official publications**

To conclude this thematic categorization, it is important to devote some time to government publications on the TRC. Most of these publications were issued to support the Commission or to give information about its proceedings. The official newsletter of the TRC was called "Truth Talk, Truth the road to reconciliation". It was published four times a year in 1996, 1997 and 1998 and dealt with the day-to-day activities of the Commission. It included interviews with staff members or witnesses, reports of hearings and critical discussions of the difficulties the TRC faced. In 1994, the working group "Justice in Transition" issued an information brochure with general information on the TRC. This brochure was distributed to inform people about the existence of the Commission, especially through schools and civil societies. After the Final Report was published in 1998, the newly formed Institute for Justice and Reconciliation issued a leaflet called "Time to Act". This publication gave a summary of the recommendations made by the TRC. Finally, there is the Final Report itself. Volumes one to five were published in October

1998, and in Sept/Oct 2003 volumes six and seven appeared. This report has been widely distributed across the globe. It is available on CD-ROM and the final two volumes can be downloaded directly from the TRC website.

### **Overlaps and lacunae**

A survey of the TRC literature has disclosed certain thematic and generic patterns. It is clear that a number of topics have been dealt with extensively, while others have been virtually neglected.

An issue that is touched upon by many authors is the relationship between amnesty and justice. The big question is whether the amnesty process brought justice to the victims, or whether it was a pragmatic and politically motivated trade-off. Many scholars try to define the concept of reconciliation in order to find out whether the TRC has brought about reconciliation of a particular kind, or whether it was only the beginning of a very long and still on-going process. In the same way, the concept of truth is elaborated on in many publications. The Commission itself raised some questions about the definition of 'truth' and about the different kinds of 'truth' it would take into consideration. This discussion was taken up by many authors, and it often led to philosophical debates about the nature of 'truth' and whether it can be captured at all. As indicated above, many publications approach the TRC from a religious point of view. Finally, some legal aspects of the TRC have been covered extensively. The fact that the amnesty process appears to go against international conventions attracted a lot of attention.

Although many different aspects of the TRC have been discussed in scholarly literature, there are still a number of topics that have received little or no attention. A very important debate in the whole TRC process was the one between the Amnesty Committee and the full TRC. Only two of the seventeen original commissioners served in the Amnesty Committee, namely Denzil Potgieter and Sisi Khampepe. All the other members were lawyers appointed by the president. Although the focus of the TRC was primarily on reconciliation, the Amnesty Committee's greater concern was to disclose and establish the truth. Therefore, the discourse and the proceedings of the Amnesty Committee were much more formal than those in the other TRC hearings. The significance of these differences in membership, focus and discursive patterns is illustrated in the lawsuit the TRC instituted against the Amnesty Committee in 1997. Nevertheless, this matter is hardly ever discussed in the literature.

Another lacuna relates to the preceding events of the TRC. Most of the authors concentrate on the public hearings, while only very few talk about what preceded

with regard to decisions, arguments, appointing commissioners, selecting and rejecting applicants, deciding where hearings would take place, etc. The fact is that thousands of testimonies were written down by statement takers, while only a small selection were afforded the opportunity to testify at the public hearings. Besides, testimonies had to be corroborated and people had to be briefed on what to expect during the hearings. Only a limited number of publications deal with these preparations or with the huge amount of work that happened behind the scenes. The TRC also tried to follow-up victims and to debrief them after they had testified. This work of the TRC was important to ensure a positive public reception of the Commission, and yet it has hardly been touched on in scholarly discourses.

An aspect of the TRC that was largely dealt with behind the scenes was the work of the Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation. Its work was seen to be crucial for the future of the country, as it was responsible for recommending a reparations policy and for making findings on the basis of victim and perpetrator testimonies. Many publications topicalize the necessity of reparations and the failures of this policy. Very few, however, mention the amount of work that went into actually designing these recommendations. It is an enduring impression in South Africa that the Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation has been the least successful part of the TRC, while the Committee on Human Rights Violations is seen as the most successful. Interestingly, the attention the three committees get in scholarly work reflects a focus on the work of the Committee that is perceived to have achieved much, and neglect of the work of the Committees that did not meet expectations.

During the hearings, or in their statements, some of the victims expressed a desire to meet the perpetrators responsible for their particular suffering. Some of these meetings were actually realized with the help of the TRC. Very few publications deal with these meetings outside of the TRC (Ericson 2001), although for the people involved they were crucial in establishing a feeling of reconciliation (Chapman 1999).

A final aspect of the TRC neglected in the publications relates to the testifying victims. Very little is known about their backgrounds, their expectations and their motivations. The TRC claimed that these witnesses were ordinary people, but this has not really been verified through actual research. During the hearings, the victims were often asked about their expectations. They then talked about their motivations to appear before the TRC and expressed a request about what they wanted the TRC to do for them in the future. Virtually no other information is available. It would be interesting to investigate the motivations and expectations of the witnesses outside the context of the hearings. It is a pity that this kind of research was not carried out, as it is almost impossible to study it retrospectively. Victims



would presumably still be able to express the motivations they had for participating. However, their expression of expectations will probably have changed in the course of the proceedings and due to the lapse of time.

## Conclusion

This chapter has given a preliminary overview of the TRC literature by classifying the literature thematically. Each thematic category was illustrated by discussing some major publications. It is important to stress that not all of the TRC literature has been considered in this article. Nevertheless, this chapter gives an impression of the TRC topics that attracted a lot of interest and reminds of the elements that appear to be forgotten, neglected or ignored. In this way, the chapter gives a survey of the debate on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

It is not easy to find out what determined the direction of attention to or away from certain topics in the literature on the TRC. It is a general phenomenon that activities outside of the public view are neglected. This explains why the preparatory activities before the TRC hearings and the work of the Committee on Reparation and Rehabilitation have been dealt with sparsely. Also, the TRC was a real media event, so publications tend to follow the focus that was directed by and became prominent in the media. The media has well-defined selection criteria when deciding what societal matters deserve attention (see Fowler 1994; Hall 1997; i.a.).

It is therefore rather obvious that both the media and the literature focused on highly emotional or controversial items such as justice for the victims, reconciliation between former enemies, and the amnesty hearings.

Even allowing for such considerations, we are justified in expecting researchers and writers dealing with an event as unique and as hugely significant as the TRC, to be guided by criteria more profound than mere popular interest. Considerations of national unity and reconciliation would be such criteria in deciding which matters to topicalize. Especially the activities of the TRC that have relevance for the future should be covered. Thus, not only issues regarding amnesty or reconciliation, but also regarding the reparations policy and the motivations of the victims deserve attention. Here attention to preparatory activities of the TRC is crucial. It would generate deeper insight into the proceedings of the Commission and develop better understanding of certain decisions that were taken. This can then help explain certain achievements and failures of the Commission, and both positive and negative impressions of the TRC can be put in perspective. Moreover, discussing preceding activities of the TRC would be essential if one considers the

South African TRC as a model for communities dealing with similar human rights violations elsewhere.

To sum up, there is abundant literature on the South African TRC and many perspectives have been extensively covered. This chapter has given a general overview that should guide researchers with a wide range of interests. Hopefully it can also stimulate further investigation, particularly into areas where obvious lacunae exist.

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Listing all of the publications that have been referred to in this chapter will take too much space. I therefore refer to the TRC Research Website (<http://africana.ugent.be/trc.htm>) where all of the above mentioned publications — and also many publications not covered in this article — can be found. Nevertheless, a bibliography giving reference to only the cited works discussed in more detail is given below.

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# Narrative inequality in the TRC hearings

## On the hearability of hidden transcripts

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South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission victim hearings were a highly unusual discourse event in which previously silenced and powerless people were offered a prestigious public forum and speech format to tell about their experiences of human rights violations. However, despite the equal access offered to victims for the telling of their stories, pre-existing inequalities persisted and were reflected in the relative 'hearability' of these stories. We use the concept of 'pretextuality' to account for the relative hearability. The concept refers to the varying degrees of competence in language varieties, literacy and narrative skills that people bring with them to a communicative interaction, and which influence the impact of their narratives. Through detailed analysis of selected testimonies, we demonstrate ways in which the inequalities suggested above emerged in the hearings.

### 1. Introduction

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has been instrumental in the ongoing process of reconciliation in South African society since the abolition of the Apartheid system. Most observers will agree on this, as well as on the observation that so far, very little detailed research has been carried out on the actual proceedings of the TRC. Consequently, the wealth of historical, political, moral, social and cultural information buried in the TRC proceedings remains largely untapped (see Villa-Vicencio and Verwoerd 2000; Posel and Simpson 2002 for recent surveys).

In this chapter, we will embark on an exploration of discursive aspects of the actual public (and broadcast) TRC victim hearings. We focus on the public hearings conducted by the TRC's Human Rights Violations Committee which all revolve around testimonies from witnesses: narratives of personal experiences by people

framed and contextualized as victims of power abuse and human rights violations. The genre is peculiar to the extent that the TRC hearings can be seen as ‘freak events’: highly exceptional stagings for discourses of suffering produced by people, many of whom had previously been rendered voiceless and powerless but who, due to macro-historical causes, could now be put on the public forum as important, relevant and instructive storytellers. This public forum was controlled and carefully structured. The hearings were broadcast through the South African national media, thus creating a platform for lifting personal experiences to the level of national history and national consciousness.

This is where narrative inequality enters the picture. As observed above, the people who were heard by the TRC were framed as important, relevant and instructive storytellers; they were put on a stage on which all efforts were made to treat them as such. Yet, it is clear that the stories of some people made it (or will make it) more easily into ‘history’ than those of others. Some stories will prove, in due course, to have made a bigger impact than others (see for illustrations Antjie Krog’s powerful account of the TRC hearings: Krog 1998). These other stories may disappear and be kept as factual evidence only — on-record accounts of atrocities containing the relevant facts, dates and names of people and places — while the possibly highly relevant individual and political experiences articulated in the stories pass unnoticed. People don’t enter the public forum as equals. They may be *said* to be equal, but saying it doesn’t make it so. One important task in making the most of the TRC proceedings thus consists in uncovering the various ‘unheard’ aspects of what witnesses told during their hearings.

We shall offer a series of reflections and suggestions revolving around inequality in producing narratives during the hearings. Though obviously aimed at providing more detailed documentation on these hearings, the purpose of the chapter is larger. We wish to demonstrate the importance of looking at discourse work in the TRC hearings, for it tells us a lot about the type of meanings and information produced in the hearings — thus, it may provide a sounder basis for using these data as historical documents. It also speaks to the wider framework in which the hearings, as historical events, have to be set: social, political and cultural contexts which both provide interpretive frames for what is being performed, and suggest insights into the often invisible structures that control or determine what can be observed at other levels as processes of transformation in societies.

## 2. Hidden transcripts

The point of departure in our approach is the historicity of discourses — all discourses, but most obviously discourses that have been predefined as ‘historic’ such

as the TRC hearings. A crucial, but often overlooked, aspect of meaning in discourse analysis is historical meaning, the way in which one-time discourse events acquire, possess and keep meanings larger than just the ones 'linguistically' articulated. It is the historicity of discourse that allows it to be kept as a record of events and experiences larger than just an individual one, and it is the historicity of discourse that enables it to be remembered, quoted, recontextualized, re-used, and so forth (Silverstein and Urban 1996; see also Martin and Wodak 2003). This point of departure forces the discourse analyst to look beyond words and sounds, and to look at *discourse*: practices of uttering based on and embedded in larger economies of signs and meanings, couched in traditions of using language in particular ways — genres, ways of speaking, norms, conventions — and open to permanent evaluation by socially and culturally different audiences. These larger aspects have often been addressed by discourse analysts, drawing notably on Bakhtin, under the label of intertextuality. In its crudest form, intertextuality stands for the principle that whenever we open our mouths, they are full of the words of others. We quote, recontextualize, reorganize and re-use used speech whenever we communicate. Every utterance, spoken or written, has a history of use and abuse, of interpretation, and (often forgotten) of assessment and evaluation as valuable, important, relevant, socially acceptable or inconsequential, trivial, socially unacceptable and so forth. Intertextuality explains why people 'understand' each other and why words 'make sense', not only linguistically but also socially, culturally, politically and so on (see Blommaert 2001a, 2005 for a discussion).

It is the latter aspect that deserves more detail here. Ways of speaking are socially positioned, some discourses have more 'weight' than others. It is through the works of Bernstein (1990), Bourdieu (1991), Hymes (1996) and others that we have come to realize the importance of this: the 'meaning' articulated in discourses is a function of the relative 'value' of these discourses socially. The words of some, providing they match criteria of appropriate production, are perceived as more reliable and important than those of others, and discourses can be mapped in terms of power and impact. Bourdieu (1991) coined the term 'legitimate language' for this phenomenon: in order to make oneself understood (including: in order to make the desired impact with one's words), one has to produce *specific forms of discourse*, not just any discourse. Thus, certain discourses are socially recognizable as the discourses of the powerful, while others are not, and some people have a hard time making themselves understood in circumstances where legitimate discourses are required but are beyond their reach (Blommaert 2005).

A useful terminological and analytical framework, one that captures the historicity of discourse as well as the relative social positionings of different discourses, is provided by James C. Scott (1990). In an attempt at providing a more empirically

sustainable approach to power and hegemony, Scott proposes to differentiate between *public transcripts* and *hidden transcripts*. Scott starts from a view in which, in conditions of oppression, the powerful and the oppressed share public transcripts — ways of talking to and about each other and ways of dealing with each other, in public — but simultaneously have in-group hidden transcripts, discourses about themselves, the others, and the relationships between both groups. To the realm of the public transcripts belong forms of social etiquette, arguments, behaviors, but also stories and accounts that regulate the status quo and maintain as well as express and fortify power and inequality. To the realm of the hidden transcripts belong very different behaviors, stories and accounts, often expressing explicit disapproval, hate and desires of retaliation. Public transcripts are necessary for the powerful to maintain power, and to the powerless to safeguard themselves and to protect them from power abuse. Thus Scott (1990: 3) suggests that “the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask”. These masks are important to both parties: the colonial administrator should show her/himself as a strong, confident person at all times (except in the all-whites club in the evening, when no colonial subjects can witness the hidden transcripts), and the colonial subject should at all times be humble, deferent and complying. Hidden transcripts can be forced to the surface in crises and conflicts, when people suddenly burst into ‘telling the truth’ about the other, usually triggering retaliation from the other (and in any case resetting the score between both parties).

For our concern here, the hidden transcripts are most appealing. On the basis of material from slaveholding societies in the pre-civil war US, the caste system in India and other cases of extremely unequal societies, Scott notes how hidden transcripts become a group-defining criterion. Talk about how one hates the white man became a defining feature for black ‘brothers’ in the US South, and often discourses emerged in which fantasies of retaliation were articulated in almost millenarian ways. Hidden transcripts were often rehearsed and could take on codified shapes (e.g. in ritual curses, songs, anecdotes, stories, rhymes). So whereas there may be individual desires to take revenge — Scott uses Nietzsche’s notion of ‘Ressentiment’ to define this individual emotion — the hidden transcript is a feature of power relations and is thus a social and cultural phenomenon. The stories of the powerless defined the powerless in relation to the powerful and organized their resistance against oppression. In severely unequal societies, they form an often invisible layer of circulating discourses (legitimate language, to use Bourdieu’s term), the existence of which was often suspected by both parties (hence the widespread image in colonial societies that the colonial subjects were devious and unreliable) but whose absence from the public domain precisely defined the inequality of the system.

Scott could easily have included South Africa under Apartheid in his analysis, for if we take his viewpoint, what the TRC hearings did was to bring hidden transcripts to the public forum. Many of the victims belonged to the voiceless segment of society, and for these Scott's observation about masks certainly obtained. Adding to their 'intrinsic' function in an unequal society, many of the stories also originated in resistance cultures — among members of organized anti-Apartheid movements, and defined the culture of these movements. Consequently, what we face in the TRC hearings is a far-reaching redressing of the legitimate codes in South African society: the hidden transcript becomes the public transcript, codes of resistance become codes of power and authority (and vice versa).

This is by no means an easy exercise, for the transcripts are still particular discourses, that is, discourses that are, and need to be, formulated in particular ways in order to be sustainable as discourses of power or resistance. And this is where narrative conventions, genres and specific codes of expression and sense-making come in, and where Scott's insights need to be blended with those of Bernstein, Bourdieu, Hymes and others. 'Public' and 'hidden' are terms that refer to status hierarchies in discourse; hence, to particular ways of producing and perceiving discourse, and this is a technical, discourse-analytical issue.

### 3. Making sense in the TRC

As said above, the TRC hearings are a peculiar, highly exceptional discourse event. Put in its simplest form, the exceptional character of the hearings is due to the fact that a format of power and prestige is offered to the powerless, and that in this 'high' format, 'low' discourse modes are allowed, even invited and elicited, as we shall see. The overall shape of the hearings is thus one in which different discourse 'cultures' are mixed: at least one belonging to the center of power and authority in society (the public broadcasting frame, the legalistic interrogation frame, see below) and several belonging to subaltern, non-elite strata of society. This creates contexts for authoritative discourse, as we suggested above. But at the same time, it contains risks of *pretextual gaps*: the subaltern voices may not always fit well in the format in which they are placed (cf. Maryns and Blommaert 2002). The suggestion of authority contained in the framing of the TRC hearings is not always matched by the accomplishment of real authority by narrators. Previously existing, structural forms of social and cultural inequality may percolate into the hearings, over and beyond attempts to grant power to the powerless. Making sense in the TRC is thus not a straightforward matter: despite the creation of favorable circumstances, people may still fail to make themselves heard beyond the immediate context of



the hearings, and despite the framing of equality and sympathy which is at the core of the TRC hearing structure, inequalities may still occur.

In the remainder of this section, we shall first discuss and elucidate the issue of different pretextualities. Next, we shall provide more details on the TRC public hearing format, focusing on the stability of the overall structure of the hearing procedure, and we shall introduce three features of discourse in the TRC hearings in which inequalities are articulated.

### 3.1 Different pretextualities

People carry with them a 'baggage' of socially conditioned communicative skills, ranging from 'bare' resources such as different degrees of proficiency in languages or language varieties (including, prominently, literacy), narrative and argumentative skills, and the capacity to anticipate what is required in interaction as well as to interpret what goes on in interaction. Much of this complex of communicative skills has been captured under the notion of 'communicative competence' (Hymes 1972, 1992). At the same time, what has often been overlooked in empirical research is the way in which communicative competence creates differential conditions on sayability, or more generally, the way in which differences in communicative competence are a real dynamic in social interaction. Some people, due to differences in communicative competence, simply cannot engage in certain forms of interaction (a simple example is that illiterates do not actively engage or participate in literate culture). Some people have no control over the appropriate skills to talk about topics in the expected or required ways. They cannot deploy required or expected (legitimate, *pace* Bourdieu) genres, styles, formats. Consequently, what they say or write is either not noticed, or easily disqualified as meaningless, trivial, or nonsensical. Much in the way that context has now been generally accepted as a crucial factor in understanding what goes on in communication, one should accept that 'pretexts' are equally crucial influences on communication, more specifically, that different forms of pretextuality with people are a feature of most instances of communication and that communication usually develops under the umbrella of inequality.

Returning for a moment to James Scott's hidden transcripts, it seems that the difference between public and hidden transcripts would often include differences in pretextualities. The hidden — dissident, subversive or rebellious — transcripts would often be produced in formats seen as inappropriate for the public forum. They can be produced in substandard (dialect or slang) varieties of language, outside of literacy channels, in emotive or irrational keys and often using stylistic devices that would be qualified as folkloric, ritualistic or informal. Hidden transcripts often take

the shape of subaltern discourses, discourses that carry the stigma of the nonelite groups in society. They often clash with the linguistic ideologies inscribed in elite discourses: emphases on logic, coherence, standard language and literacy (see Collins 1996; Hymes 1996; Jacquemet 1992; Blommaert 2001b). Thus, they become an argument for disqualification as illegitimate discourses, and the status of hidden transcript is to a large extent inscribed in the structure of the transcript itself.

Bringing this back to the hearings, the problematic should now become clear. The overall format was formalistic and tightly structured, and the hearings were presided over by commissioners who used prestigious, elite forms of language as well as specific genres associated with 'seriousness' and importance. But remember that, at the same time, many of the subjects interviewed by the TRC belonged to subelite strata of society. Some spoke non-standard varieties of English, sometimes making grammatical errors, using slang, switching into other languages such as (varieties of) Afrikaans; others gave their accounts in an African language. But these testifiers also often used forms of coherence that did not fit the prestige criteria of logical consistency and linearity. And finally, their story often had to be elicited interactionally by the TRC officials, so as to ensure that all aspects not initially volunteered were made available for the record. Such features of the TRC hearings offer a window on existing and persisting inequalities in South African societies, despite explicit attempts at creating optimal conditions for communication as equals. These persisting inequalities have an impact on hearability: the way in which people perform during TRC hearings influences the way in which their story is perceived, and this perception does not necessarily correspond to the message the speaker actually tried to get across. We are thus confronted with socially and culturally conditioned meaning gaps that need to be explored in greater detail, as part of the reconstruction of meanings produced during the TRC hearings.

### 3.2 The hearing format

The format and some of the unusual discourse features of the Human Rights Violations hearings derive from the aims and objectives of the TRC. These have been discussed in the introduction, therefore we will very briefly refer to them here.

The TRC sought two perspectives on the history of human rights violations: on the one hand, individual stories of suffering, and on the other, broad patterns of events were recounted. Important to the aim of bringing about reconciliation was the mode of enquiry, which both offered space to multiple and diverse voices, and permitted public acknowledgement of previously untold suffering.

The specific structure of the Human Rights Violations (HRV) hearings and the type of discourse(s) employed arise out of the questions, considerations and

aims set out in the introduction. The public hearings were conducted according to a formal and uniform procedure. The day's hearings would begin with some introductory words from the chairperson and the reading of a list of those who were to appear that day. After each witness took her or his seat on the platform, accompanied by a briefer, the chairperson briefly introduced the witness and asked them to take the oath or affirmation. The facilitator would ask the witness to "tell us a little bit about yourself" and then to tell her or his story. The witness's initial, usually uninterrupted, block of narrative was followed by questions from the panel members, which frequently elicited further narratives; an invitation to the speaker to say what she or he hoped to gain from the commission; and some concluding words from the chairperson.

Despite the common structure and equal opportunity to be heard, the diversity of the voices at the public hearings lay not only in the content of the stories. Pretextual gaps become apparent in the unequal narrative skills of the witnesses, in their varying understanding of the conditions and requirements of the emerging genre of the HRV hearings, and their ability to adapt their narrative styles to it. Witnesses also differed in their apparent awareness of, and response to, the immediate context of the hearings, in particular the multi-layered audience. Some showed a clear sense of the wider audience. For example, one speaker names and refers to people present in the hall, overtly drawing them into the interaction, while by contrast, another speaker looks down at the table in front of her as she tells her story, raising her head only at crucial moments in her narrative to make eye-contact with the commissioners, and pays no overt attention to the audience in the hall.

Intertextuality creates another difference in the hearability of stories. Some stories had not reached the public prior to the hearing. Some of the testifiers spoke about their experiences for the first time when they told them to the statement takers.<sup>1</sup> Other stories, for various reasons, received attention in the media, both at the time the event originally took place, and at the time of the TRC hearings.

In the next sections, we will offer three vignettes demonstrating the sort of inequality phenomena mentioned above. First, in Section 4, we will discuss the phenomenon of elicitation: commissioners offering interactional assistance to victims, thus contextualizing and framing their stories in ways that orient their stories to the overall requirements and expectations of the TRC hearings. Section 5 will delve deeper into this issue of 'getting a story right'. We shall investigate the ways in which one victim adopts subcultural styles for narrating his experience, thus causing a misfit in genre expectations that needs to be redressed by the commissioners. Section 6 will engage in a discussion of patterns of narrative structure as these affected coherence, which in turn influenced the hearability of texts.

#### 4. Framing and contextualizing stories: The commissioners' role

Being heard is a matter of uptake by an audience. Scholars have emphasized the part played by the audience in influencing the production of spoken and written narratives (Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Duranti 1986; Ochs 1997). For Bakhtin, the listener's response, even when it is silent, is of primary importance in communication (1981: 282). Verbal responses may take the form of elicitation, comment on, explanation or evaluation of aspects of a narrative. An interlocutor may help the speaker to make sense of the events or explore their meaning in the broader social or cultural context in which they occur (Ochs and Capps 2001). The interlocutor's generalizing or explaining of the experience may result in a shift in point of view from a single individual to other perspectives or a more 'authorial' and possibly authoritative point of view. Such forms of intervention all contribute to the shaping, and thus the collaborative nature, of the narrative. As Ochs points out, "The entitlement to co-tell a narrative is a powerful right" (Ochs 1997: 201).

This right is exercised by the commissioners in the HRV hearings in order to fulfill their brief of facilitating individual stories, recontextualizing them in the broader national history and of promoting healing. Witnesses, as we have suggested, varied widely in the pre-textual resources they brought to the telling of their narratives. The intervention from the commissioners was designed to level out, where possible, these differences, but it inevitably resulted in their assuming, to different degrees, co-authorship of the narratives. Ways in which narratives might be framed and contextualized are illustrated in the following analysis of the testimony of Nomonde Tyali at the HRV hearings held at the University of the Western Cape in August 1996.

Unlike the other examples quoted in this paper, Nomonde Tyali's (NT) testimony is given in Xhosa. Both the official written version and the translator's voice-over on the video-recording of her testimony are in English. This means that what we hear or read are not her own words. So, we have to restrict ourselves to analyzing general aspects of the structure of her testimony and the interaction between witness and facilitator, who spoke in English. The following analysis shows ways in which the commissioners could 'assist' in the production of the narratives: through the 'staging' of the testimony, the elicitation of additional information and reconstruction of the context of the event, and finally in the wrapping up of the hearing. What the officials do, in sum, is to align witnesses' narratives with a particular order of discourse, and in so doing they convert the narratives from private to public transcripts.

#### 4.1 Staging

‘Staging’ in the sense used by Grimes (1975) describes the way a speaker or writer uses the initial element of a text or utterance as a signpost, to indicate a point of departure for what s/he wants to say. The choice of point of departure is a powerful rhetorical device. It ensures that the audience knows what is to be talked about, but it also indicates what the speaker regards as focal. In the HRV hearings, the staging is the prerogative of the chairperson, who after introducing the witness may simply name the victim or the main event, but who may also evaluate the event or the feelings of the teller and thus set the tone for the narrative. The chairperson’s focus might or might not wholly correspond with what the testifier regards as salient. Analysis of some testimonies has shown that what the witness really wanted to say was included in neither the chairperson’s introduction nor the speaker’s main narrative, but emerged later in response to questions.

For NT’s testimony, Alex Boraine who is chairing the session also acts as facilitator. His introductory remarks include both summary and evaluation, as is illustrated in the following example, which encapsulates the purpose of the hearing and evaluates the teller’s situation:

“This is not a Court of Law, this is an opportunity for you to tell your own story which you have kept in your heart and mind for a very long time. It’s also a story that you will tell not only to the audience and to this Commission but to the whole nation.”

#### 4.2 Contextualizing and extending the narrative

The social and political context of the event was of importance to the Commission’s search for broad patterns of events. Testifiers varied as to how and to what extent they chose to contextualize their stories. Some testifiers framed their own stories in the wider historical context, while for others the framing was provided by the facilitator. NT’s story illustrates both the framing and the degree of intervention that could be exercised by the facilitator.

In the transcript, NT’s initial block of narrative contains 199 out of a total of 1680 words in the text of her hearing. (In all, her contribution amounts to 657 words in contrast to 1023 words uttered by the chairperson.) In it she tells about the death of her 16-year-old nephew, Lubalo Mtirara, who while on a visit to her family during the September school holidays in 1989 was shot dead during police action in the township of Khayelitsha. In the following extract from her initial block of narrative, the recurrence of negative verb forms — “did not inform”, “did not know”, “don’t know” — highlights the gaps in information available to the family at the time of the death:

“Those days — he went away for two days, we then got the news that he had been shot by police — by Defence Force in Khayelitsha. They, the Defence Force did not inform us, we just got this from someone. I was at work and then my brother went to look for his body and then identified the body as Lubalo. We did not know what was the cause of his shooting, because he had just shot — he was — he was here for a short while coming from the Transkei and he was only 16. So we don’t know the reason why he was shot. So this was very painful to us.”

In this block of narrative, NT tells what happened and to whom. Following it, the facilitator elicits information about Lubalo’s family and place of origin. His next set of questions concerns the context and details of the shooting and appears to be seeking answers as to how this event could have happened. The modality of his questions, the hedges and polite phrasing — “can you remember if you think back ...”, “do you think that ...” — suggests the concern for the respondent that is characteristic of the hearings. NT’s answers reiterate the lack of information:

“AB: Now can you remember if you think back you weren’t there yourself but you may have been told was there any protest or march or activity on that day when he was killed?

NT: There were — there were soldiers at the place where they have been — where he was shot and there were some disturbance which I cannot exactly tell what kind of disturbance it was.

AB: Do you think that Lubalo may have been shot almost in the crossfire or do you think he was deliberately shot by the police?

NT: I can’t tell whether he was shot deliberately because there really there was nothing that was linking him to all, he was just walking leisurely, getting to a shop.

AB: Thank you. Now there was a post-mortem. Did they ever tell you what the cause of death was?

NT: They said he died from the bullet wound on the head.”

The distribution of factual content in this testimony is unusual: the facilitator knows more about who was responsible for the shooting than the witness and therefore contributes a substantial part of the narrative. In a turn that is almost as long as her initial narrative, he tells NT that the investigative unit of the Commission has discovered that there was an enquiry at the time, that documents containing police statements are missing from the case docket, and that the policemen who had admitted to the shooting were acquitted of culpable homicide.

His final set of questions regarding Lubalo’s funeral elicit both the short term and long term effects of the shooting and allow NT to reiterate her desire for a resolution of the uncertainty surrounding the event. To the facilitator’s question, “Did the funeral go off all right?” she describes how the lives of her sister and brother were affected by Lubalo’s death:

“Yes but it was very tough in a surprising manner because my sister had nothing absolutely nothing and no-one knew what had happened and no one was making any follow up but because of this Commission my sister died and so I had to come and do this.”

And in the following turn:

“I will be delighted if the people who killed Lubalo could be exposed and they could state the reason why they killed him. Because he was not a naughty boy, he was a good boy. Even — even my brother in NY12 is sick since the time of the death of Lubalo because he also didn’t understand what had happened ...”

After prolonged elicitation she seems finally to have reached the point that affects her most deeply. These two turns offer more spontaneous information than her answers to previous questions, and her heightened distress is visible on the video-recording.

#### 4.3 Concluding the testimony

Rhetorically, the concluding words of a text, which carry end-focus, are as important as the opening. The facilitator, resuming the role of chair, concludes NT’s hearing. While acknowledging the witness’s pain, he also evaluates the place of her story in the context of similar events and of more recent history. The shift to the pronoun ‘we’ and the present tense in the following extract emphasize this generalizing and broadening of the perspective:

“And there are so many innocent people who have been caught up in the conflict and the violence of this land. And what makes it even more tragic is that he was killed so soon before the changes which have come to our country where everybody can now participate in the election and feel free and we mourn with you the loss of your nephew and feel for you very deeply.”

Nomonde Tyali’s testimony illustrates one of the unusual features of the discourse of the HRV hearings: the commissioners play down their power by softening the modalities of the interaction, yet they guide the hearing, may contribute substantially to what is told, and influence the transformation from hidden, personal to public narrative.

### 5. A deeply hidden transcript

Whenever we communicate we have *expectations of iconicity*: expectations about mappings of style and content, correspondences between ways of speaking and

topics or domains. We are expected to adopt a 'serious' style when talking about 'serious' topics, a funny one when talking about funny things. Failure to meet these expectations may be a resource for e.g. humor, irony or sarcasm; most often it generates misunderstandings and wrong-footing. In a context such as the TRC where nuances and details are crucial for the reconstruction of a historical record of the past, failure to meet expectations of iconicity may result in parts of the story not being memorable or hearable, hence not becoming a resource for interpreting the experiences of the people who provided testimony.

In the HRV hearings, the overarching topic of the narratives produced by the witnesses was *suffering*. People told heartbreaking stories of violence, abuse and loss of life and dignity. One story that was particularly striking was that of Colin de Souza, a young man from the Cape Town area. De Souza was not asked to testify about one or some particular events: his testimony was about a whole life of suffering and violence. De Souza got involved in the armed struggle at the age of 15, and for years he had been subjected to harassments, arrest, violence, imprisonment, torture. His life had been all but destroyed by the Apartheid conflict, and he still bore deep traces of his past, having severe medical problems, difficulties in finding a job and difficulties in his personal life.

De Souza produced a long narrative. He did most of the talking, often in long monological stretches triggered by questions from the facilitator Wendy Orr and commissioner Potgieter. His mother sat next to him, and at one point she was asked to tell how Colin's tragedy had affected the whole family. The framing of de Souza's story as a narrative of suffering is also made explicit in the introduction by Wendy Orr:

"Colin you're a young man, but in your life, I think you've gone through experiences which people much — much older than you probably never ever dream of."

Wendy Orr also elicits explicit descriptions of suffering in other places, as does Denzil Potgieter. We will come back to this in greater detail below. So the topic is clearly stated, and expectations of iconicity can be activated. The main problem, however, is that Colin de Souza doesn't meet these expectations: he does not produce his narrative of suffering in a style that flags the topic. There are few, if any, explicit expressions of emotion; de Souza doesn't cry, but tells his story in a composed, rather flat and factual way, emphasizing more the adventurous side of his experience than the devastating effects it had on his life. At least, that is the first reaction the story triggers, based on commonsense interpretations of the contextualization clues provided by de Souza. On the basis of such readings of the story, de Souza's story is not so much a story of deep suffering, but one of danger, excitement, fear. Work is needed in order to interpret this story as a testimony of how someone's life could be destroyed by the struggle. In rather unexpected ways,



suffering is a hidden transcript in Colin de Souza's story. We need to uncover this hidden transcript and delve deeper into the structure of the narrative.

### 5.1 The basic structure of the story

What follows is a brief synopsis of the whole hearing, providing us with a rough outline of Colin's story. The synopsis is based on a more detailed narrative transcript of the story, in which various parts and units could be distinguished. 'Parts' refers to episodically or thematically coherent sections, while 'units' are structurally marked parts of episodes, often containing anecdotes or sub-narratives.

#### *Synopsis Colin de Souza*

(CDS = Colin de Souza; WO = Wendy Orr; DP = Denzil Potgieter)

##### **Part 1:**

WO: introduction disrupted life; Question about arrest in October 1987

CDS: 11 units, factual story of arrest and interrogation in various places

##### **Part 2**

WO interrupts: Q about being assaulted

CDS: 20 units

Unit 1–7: story of torture in period of arrest

Unit 8–16: transfer to Joburg, John De Vos, tricking whites

Unit 17–20: back to Cape Town with De Vos, tricking Van Brakel, house restrictions

##### **Part 3**

WO: after that: house arrest, new arrest in June 88

CDS: 18 units

Unit 1–2: arrest

Unit 3–6: torture and interrogation

Unit 7–11: being in various prisons, coat story (unit 9)

Unit 12–15: being framed: bail but death warrant (Burger, Const. Kahn)

Unit 16–18: betrayal, comrades' attack on the house, shooting

##### **Part 4**

WO: misinformation campaign?

CDS: (brief) acknowledgement

**Part 5**

- WO: hiding, January 1989 leave the country, (new arrest)  
 CDS: 27 units, the chase  
 Unit 1–3: episode 1, at the airport  
 Unit 4–10: episode 2: the car chase, shooting  
 Unit 11–15: episode 3: hiding in Strandfontein  
 Unit 16–20: episode 4: the help from the muslim lady  
 Unit 21–22: episode 5: the car of the apostolic people  
 Unit 23–26: episode 6: hiding in Bonteheuwel  
 Unit 27: episode 7: the arrest

**Part 6**

- WO: did it affect your life?  
 CDS: 5 units  
 Unit 1–2: the security jobs  
 Unit 3: in the army  
 Unit 4–5: medical diagnosis

**Part 7**

- DP: the Wit Wolf  
 CDS: factual answer

**Part 8**

- DP: charge against Kahn  
 CDS: 6 units, the death certificate

**Part 9**

- DP: the Khotso house interrogation  
 CDS: factual answer

**Part 10**

- DP: father and girlfriend tortured?  
 CDS: 2 units: father beaten up, girlfriend physically forced to abortion.

**5.2 Where is the suffering?**

Colin de Souza is a skilled narrator who can produce elaborate event narratives in an even, balanced style, using a rather narrow and very stable range of intonation, pitch and loudness features. His main key is factual, and even when he is asked

explicitly to tell about suffering, he opts for a factual event-narrative style. He uses only very small features of style to mark certain parts of his story as more involved or more affect-laden. In three places in the hearing, Colin is explicitly asked to comment on forms of suffering. After an initial question on the conditions surrounding his first arrest, Colin embarks on a long, detailed event narrative. Wendy Orr interrupts him and starts unit 2 with the question:

“WO: Colin I am sorry to interrupt, did they assault {CDS: yes} you or torture you while they were questioning you?”

The answer produced by Colin consists first of a comment on violence, after which he shifts again into an event narrative on the theme of how he outwitted the police. Similarly, after one of the most vivid and engaging parts of the story (part 5), Wendy Orr attempts to elicit comments on suffering in the introduction to part 6:

“WO: I know you’ve only told us a small part of what you experienced in those five years and I am sorry that there is not time for us to hear more. But it’s very obvious that a large part of your life was spent being harassed, detained, tortured, intimidated, threatened, imprisoned, how has that affected your life?”

Colin responds by providing an account of his life after the struggle: the impossibility of finding a job and the fact that he is physically and psychologically damaged. After his response, Wendy Orr invites Colin’s mother to tell about the way in which Colin’s problems have affected the lives of their families. A third explicit question to Colin about suffering is provided by Denzil Potgieter, introducing part 10:

“DP: Thank you, then just finally, briefly in your statement you made a statement to the effect that they hurt your father and your girlfriend.”

So efforts are being made to keep Colin de Souza on the ‘suffering track’, from which he apparently deviates by using a vivid event narrative style.

The relation between epistemic and affective modes is a complex one. Biber and Finegan (1989: 93) coined the term ‘stance’ for complexes of lexical and grammatical expressions of attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message, and demonstrated that different ‘stances’ can be distinguished ranging from ‘emphatic expression of affect’ to a ‘faceless stance’. Labov (1984: 43–44) defined ‘intensity’ as “the emotional expression of social orientation toward the linguistic proposition: the commitment of the self to the proposition”. And Haviland (1989: 59) emphasized the interwovenness of epistemic and affective modes: “contending (or hedging or denying) the truth may be inherently argumentative and hence, by its very nature, *affective*”. So what we are looking for is mixtures of expression, in which both *knowledge* is produced as well

as *orientations to knowledge* in terms of affective, emotional stances. And we have to do this, as said above, inside a narrow range of textual-stylistic markers characteristic of Colin de Souza’s narrator style, using small contrasts between parts of the narrative as inroads into different orientations towards knowledge.

A close look at Colin de Souza’s narrative reveals two possible features that may be used as indicators of differing orientations. On the one hand, there are *pitch rises*, places where de Souza shifts into a louder, higher and more agitated voice; on the other hand there are clusters of *you know* hedges. Both occur, we believe, in nonrandom ways. Other stylistic features of performance are rare, though they occur in places: repetitions, refrains, etc. Let us take a closer look at their distribution. We use an ethnopoetic transcript of the story, in which performance features are indicated by means of indentation (specifying relations between superordinate and subordinate narrative parts), italics (specifying reported speech), slashes (indicating pauses) and underlining (specifying pitch rises and/or ‘you know’ clusters).

**Example 1: Part 1, unit 7:** de Souza produces an account of an interrogation, in which a police man identifies himself as “the Wit Wolf of the Eastern Cape”, acknowledges that he murdered a friend of Colin’s (“Ashley” — Ashley Kriel) and threatens to kill Colin as well.

“After they were finished with that two weeks with me eh that interrogation at Elsie’s River police station,

they took me this one morning to a field in Bonteheuwel  
                   where I had to show out where this arms cache were  
                               as they would call it a DLB that time,  
   dead letter box eh

we went at five o’clock at that morning on the fifteenth of October 1987

we went to this field opposite the (?Machete).

The Security Police they were digging up that whole field,  
 apparently they found nothing  
 and eh there was this one boer

                  all that I know about him,  
                   he said he was the Wit Wolf of the Eastern Cape/

He said to me

*yes Porky eh*  
*I will necklace you=I will necklace you*  
*just the way I necklaced all the other comrades*  
                   *in=mainly in the Eastern Cape*  
*and/ you mustn’t play jokes with us,*  
*this were=this is the spade that I hit Ashley with/”*

**Example 2: Part 2, units 3–4:** Colin tells a story of torture, in which at one point he is hung upside down, causing extreme sensory confusion.

“3) so when they came in,  
they saw that I was still conscious,  
          they were expecting somebody after a half an hour to be unconscious,  
so what they did is eh/  
they undress me  
and eh they chained me up,  
          you know my feet,  
          my hands to my feet  
and they had a special chains you know,  
          that they would use with the prisoners that is on awaiting trial you  
          know,  
          that chains you know  
and they would chain me up on my feet and my hand  
and put me up against this metal gate you know,  
          this metal eh  
and chained me up to that gate,  
then start beating me with the batons over my head/  
Van Brakel would pull my hair and/ you know  
and eh/ they was beating me till I was out.

4) I don’t know if it was the next day or if it was that night,  
but I regained consciousness  
          while I was laying hanging on that door,  
          metal door and eh/  
when I was regaining conscious  
I=I=I thought to myself  
          why=why am I seeing this people you know eh/ not the right side up,  
          but you know eh/ the other way around you know  
          I was// I don’t know how to explain it now  
but I was actually half way upside down you know”

**Example 3: part 3, unit 5:** Again Colin provides an account of torture involving repeated beatings and choking.

“5) And then Du Plessis would just every time hit me with his fist  
and say  
          *jong go to hell with that,*  
          *still giving you time to think over and plan*  
and he would hit me so badly you know  
          I would just lay on the ground  
and then they put a chair against the door you know,  
open the door

and they put the chair in the door  
 and they said to me  
     *look here we want you stand on top of this chair*  
     *because we want to take your height*  
 and eh without I knowing that Captain Du Plessis was standing on top of a table or a chair  
 at the back side of this open door  
 and then he grabbed me around my neck  
 and choked me with his arm you know.  
     Choked me all/  
     till I was like out you know  
 and after that ten twenty minutes of beating up there,  
 they left me, you know  
 took me to a cell  
 and throw me=threw me in the cell there.”

**Example 4: Part 3, units 17–19.** Here a story is told of how comrades of Colin’s chased him and attempted to kill him, believing that he had become a police informer.

“17) and apparently at that time Jacques draw out a gun  
     to force his way into the house  
     like to shoot me/  
 and eh my father grabbed him  
 and there was a whole twist outside  
 and my brother-in-law/ eh he hit Jacques you know  
 and the gun fall=fall over the balcony right down you know  
 and they chased the group,  
     it was a group of youths  
     it was about sixteen of them you know.  
         Some of them were with me in this/ in this trials of the BMW  
 and eh/ the chase went right around the street  
 and eh my father and my brother-in-law they arrived.

18) At that time I had a firearm/  
     but it was for my own purpose.  
 I took out the firearm,  
 I put it underneath my jersey/  
 I went outside  
     because I check  
         now it’s too dangerous to be inside the house.  
         And I want to move now,  
         out of the area.

19) As we were still standing outside to move eh  
 this group of comrades  
     and there was some gangsters also with,

they came shooting around the corner,  
    before even they take the bend the shots was firing  
    and they were shooting and throwing bricks  
and my mother and eh/ my father they ran into this/  
and with my baby brother ran into this people downstairs house,  
    that the=the=their surname were Brooks,  
they ran into this house  
and these people locked the door,  
and I and my brother-in-law Kevin Arendse was still outside/  
    locked outside.  
    The people inside didn't want to open the door  
and here these people were preparing to shoot/  
    and/ eh/ there was like a BIG fight you know  
and one guy he was still trying to=to cock the gun  
but the gun jammed you know  
and at that time as I was shouting *open the door*,  
the people inside opened the door  
and as my brother-in-law Kevin Arendse and I ran into the house,  
and the door closed  
the shots just went down  
and the bullets ran through the doors and through the windows and all that.”

**Example 5: Part 5, unit 7:** A very agitated part of a chase story, in which Colin again gets shot at by security personnel.

“7) we drive through Mandalay  
and then they catch up against us,  
Constable Kahn drove right in front of us  
and as we passed through them into Mitchell's Plain,  
    without knowing that they were having a helicopter monitoring us from the air  
    you know.  
Then they were chasing us right down (?Baden Powell) Drive  
    as you take the=to turn into Swartklip.  
As we took that road into Swartklip  
    we were actually driving very fast you know,  
    they couldn't catch up with their cars eh  
I immediately see at the back of us  
there was like this maroon eh metallic eh blue Alfa Romeo  
came right from the back  
    very fast  
and this guy he was hanging out with a machine gun  
and he was shotting at=shooting at our wheels.  
And at that time they shot our wheels flat/  
    both our back wheels were flat  
and they shot through the windows eh

the back windows were in,  
 the front windows,  
 all the windows of the car was in,  
 the car started to burn,  
 and at that time  
 Van Brakel and his other Security cops had the time/ eh to=to=to come near us  
 and they were shooting just —  
 you know they were driving next to us you know  
 and shooting with the sixteen-shooters/ you know  
 but/ most of the koeëls=most of the bullets missed us by seconds.  
 I can remember I was sitting low in my seat  
 and the head cover of the seat you know  
 it was full of=full of bullets you know  
 because the sponge you know, it grabbed some of the bullets there you know”

**Example 6: Part 6, unit 5:** Colin tells about his medical condition as described to him by an army doctor.

“5) and eh he said/  
 I was tortured so severely you know  
 that the stress built up on my eh=eh small brain you know  
 because of keeping secrets and that stuff all in you know  
 and it formed almost like a cancer in my brain,  
 that’s why all my hair,  
 I lost all my hair you know  
 during that time when I was in prison for that two years you know.”

**Example 7: Part 8, units 4–5:** Colin tells how, when he intended to file a complaint against a police officer, a senior officer confronted him with his own death certificate. Note that apart from pitch rises in “shocked”, Colin also uses repetitive patterns to stress the feeling of shock.

“5) And he showed to me eh a paper  
 that was actually a death certificate  
 that was stamped and was being signed by the State Security branch,  
 the head of the State Security police branch.  
 I read the name  
 with the name of Viljoen/ on the signature/  
 He showed it to my mother  
 we all were shocked,  
 he said

*here I am having all the other comrades’ names,*  
 he named the names Ashley Kriel, Anton Fransch, Andrew November and Colin de Souza/  
 And I was like shocked shocked for what this guy showed me there at that office/  
 So eh/ during that you know the harassing us”



### 5.3 Discussion

Colin de Souza's event narratives are stylistically dense in the sense that he uses sequences of clauses introduced by "and" or "so" to mark rapid sequences of events. But they contain relatively few of the well-known markers of performance and affect: ethnopoetic patterns such as repetitions, pitch alterations, exclamations or ideophones (see Hymes 1998 for a survey). So the places where he deviates stylistically from his main line of narration are salient and need to be looked at in greater detail. Two features seem to stand out: pitch rises, seen against a general pattern of flat pitch contours, and clusters of the hedge "you know". Both features, we would suggest, are features of performance and should be seen as markers of different 'intensity' in Labov's terms, different orientations towards what he tells.

These features occur in rather expected places: whenever Colin de Souza narrates extremely disturbing events — torture scenes, being shot at, being assaulted by his friends, being diagnosed as very sick, being declared a dead man — the features occur. The fact that they are salient is best understood when contrasted with places from where they are absent. These features do not occur in most of the stories of arrest, interrogation or escape, and they do not occur in the account of the terrible damage inflicted on his father and his girlfriend (the latter underwent a forced abortion), an event which he tells in a composed style, marked with just one single repetitive pattern (marked by <):

#### Example 8: Part 10, unit 2

"2) And eh my girlfriend she was pregnant=pregnant at that time  
and what they actually did is  
they sent her to this Dr Siroky at Bellville South  
and eh/ he actually gave her this abortion pills in/  
    they forced it into her      <  
and she knew/  
    because they forced in      <  
and after having her two days in detention,  
    she would start bleeding  
    and everything would come down  
    and they sent her home//"

What we are confronted with here is what Ochs and Schieffelin (1989) drew our attention to: that affect markers are not a stable and closed category, but that any feature of talk can potentially serve an affect-marking function when it is stylistically contrastive with other features. Colin's story is a story of suffering, disguised as event narrative. The problem in detecting this suffering aspect of his story is that he does not use 'common' markers of affect — the usual ethnopoetic patterns

— but that he uses less visible stylistic markers to set out ‘a moral universe’ (Haviland 1989: 61) in his story. The question is why this happens in such a way; we offer a few conjectures in this respect.

#### 5.4 Suffering as a way of life

One of the very informative aspects of James Scott’s treatment of hidden transcripts is the relation he sketches between such transcripts and patterns of ideological incorporation. Classical treatments of hegemony often assume that hegemony proceeds by the incorporation of elite values, assumptions and arguments into the consciousness of the oppressed. Against this view, Scott argues that more often than not, what we meet are ‘hegemonic appearances’ (1990: 85) or ‘orthopraxy’ rather than ‘orthodoxy’ (1990: 117). In fact, it is precisely the existence of a public transcript that makes hidden transcripts invisible, obliterates resistance and shapes an image of ideological incorporation. Upon closer inspection, we can see very different versions, rooted in very different traditions of talking and thinking about topics, and very often leading us into a more ‘subcultural’ view of particular representations of reality.

Colin de Souza displays emotion, but by means of unpredictable, rather unexpected features of talk, small stylistic contrasts between parts of the story he tells. He ‘orthopractically’ aligns his story with factual event narratives, from which explicit emotion or accounts of suffering are nearly elided. We see traces of the illegitimacy of suffering in his narrative: the absence of explicit suffering markers defines Colin de Souza as a historical subject, setting him in the larger picture of Apartheid and indexing his role (and identity) in this larger picture. He was not one who suffered, but one who struggled. The history of unspeakability of suffering was a theme in many of the hearings, victims often referring to the silencing performed by the system on them. And as seen above, the TRC hearings often used this motif as a crucial ingredient of the performances: for the first time, victims could tell their stories and receive legitimacy for their expressions of pain and anger. Colin de Souza, however, did not ‘open up’; he stuck to the codes of the hidden transcript of his subculture, a community of people in the Military Wing in which sacrifice was a central value, and for which beating the system was the most important claim to glory. In his hearing, a hidden transcript is brought to the surface, full of codes of expression that do not match the new public transcript. It is therefore easily misunderstood as a narrative *without* pain and suffering. It requires an effort to uncover his narrative as one in which pain and suffering are indeed expressed: they are expressed *subculturally*, not *culturally* in terms of the new post-Apartheid culture of recognition of suffering.

## 6. Coherence and structure

In this section we turn our attention to transcripts in the literal sense of the word, and consider some problematic aspects of the written transcripts as records of the oral narratives. The official transcripts are a central element in the textual chain with which this paper is concerned. Their form is, we argue, likely to affect the reader's judgment of and response to the narrative.

Judgments of a narrative's truth, factuality and acceptability are closely tied to textual and discursive criteria, one of which is coherence. Unrehearsed narratives told at the hearings were not always structured in a way that made them easy to follow, though facilitators sometimes intervened to ask for or to provide clarification. Where the story was known to members of the audience, they could fill in some missing elements for themselves, for example in placing people, times, events or places mentioned but not explained by the testifier. However, and this is a point we wish to stress, even unknown stories would have been easier to follow in their original oral, face-to-face form than in their transcribed form because gesture, facial expression, body language, intonation and pauses — all crucial aspects of conveying meaning in speech (cf. Cameron 2001: 37) — would have been available to people in the audience but they are not available to readers of the official transcripts. And it is the transcribed versions that are the most easily obtainable for people in other places and times: they can be downloaded from the TRC website, free of charge. All the testimonies have been transcribed and are available there, but we believe that some will be found more coherent and are thus more hearable than others.

In a story told face-to-face, words and grammatical structure do not have to carry all of the meaning. Gaze, facial expression, gesture and intonation can be used to encode and decode matters as diverse as the narrator's attitude or stance towards an event or person in the story, the spatial position or size of items/characters in the story, the salience of phrases or sentences relative to the surrounding text, a change of speaker within the story. Much of what can be presented simultaneously in an oral text (through a combination of nonverbal and verbal elements) must be separately articulated and presented sequentially in a written text. In a written text, the words on the page, their punctuation and spatial arrangement have to carry all of that meaning. Unfortunately, in the official transcripts all that the transcribers were concerned with was capturing the words and who uttered them. There is no indication of *how* they were said. Neither punctuation nor paragraphing was used to indicate affect or narrative structure. The transcripts are a heavily regimented genre, often seen in a textualist linguistic ideology as ideal replicas of spoken narratives. But obviously, the mapping of oral onto written modes is only partial.

Where voice and gesture are absent, it is the internal structure of utterances and their sequence that are relied upon to indicate what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded. If experience of having to produce and to read ‘polished’ written narratives has disposed readers to expect that the teller’s evaluation of relative salience will be encoded syntactically, they may be disconcerted to read chains of co-ordinate clauses carrying both central and peripheral elements of the story. But as Labov pointed out in his early work on personal narratives (Labov 1972), oral accounts of what he calls complicating action typically do not contain subordination. In the TRC narratives, complex sentences with multiple subordination are found mainly in sections devoted to contextualizing or evaluating the main point of focus in the story. The relative salience of components of the action is indicated in other ways, for example through lexical choices and lexical and structural repetition; intonation and pausing (which are not indicated in TRC transcripts). Given the differences between the resources used in oral and written texts, it is clear that where a story is produced in one medium and received in another, coherence may be hard to find.

To illustrate the challenges to readers of the TRC’s official transcripts, we turn our attention to extracts from two narratives, each dealing with a single violation. Our only alteration to the texts as downloaded from the web-site is to insert a number for each of the chunks punctuated as one sentence. As readers will see, the transcribers’ division of text into sentences is somewhat arbitrary.

It is important to note that both testifiers were highly educated people whose work had given them a great deal of experience in listening to stories of pain and trauma and writing up reports on them. Zubeida Jaffer was a journalist; Ganief Allie was a teacher and counselor. Both were testifying in English in which they had native-speaker proficiency. Thus, compared with hundreds of others, these two testifiers were at an enormous advantage in the resources they could deploy in presenting their stories. Yet, even for their stories, there is no easy passage from oral presentation to transcript.

The first extract comes from the journalist’s account of an extended period during which she was incarcerated, interrogated and tortured. It constitutes lines 101–123 of a piece of uninterrupted narrative that is 275 lines long and is presented as one paragraph.

“ (1) Then he left and he left me in this room — left me in this room with these two policeman and he said to them he said to me — he said to them they must watch me. (2) And me made me stand in the middle of the room and I just had to stand there and then at some point they allowed me to sit and I was getting very — starting to get very hot and I was getting these pains across my chest. (3) But I — I didn’t really think then, I just felt I was getting really ill because I hadn’t slept for the few days. (4) And he said he was going to go away, but he was coming back

again. (5) And then I started seeing — I started seeing all my veins in my hand dilating. (6) And in my arms, my veins in my hands and my arms and I — and I felt pains across my chest and suddenly I started feeling like me — all my insides were going to come out. (7) And I said to them I am going to get sick, I am going to get sick, and the one guy ran with me to the toilet to take me to the toilet and the other guy ran to the phone and he said it's starting, now at that point I didn't think anything of it. (8) I didn't have any idea I was just terrified but when I explained to the lawyer afterwards what had happened, I told the whole story to him, upon my release, he rushed me to the doctor because he said that — that I had obviously been drugged and that they were waiting to see what the reaction was going to be. (9) And — but at that point I didn't know, I was just seeing all my veins dilating, it looked like worms— it looked like worms coming out of my hands. (10) It was all standing up I thought my blood vessels were going to burst and I just felt this pains across my chest and I felt this complete — completely like I was you know — going to be very-very ill.”

As is the case with all the TRC transcripts, there is no paragraphing to distinguish the larger units of the narrative from one another. In terms of focus, the extract falls into three parts: the first (sentence 1 to half-way through sentence 7) deals with the onset of her symptoms; the second (the rest of sentence 7 and sentence 8) deals with her telling the lawyer about them and his response; while in the third (sentences 9 and 10) the focus returns to the symptoms.

As is typical of unrehearsed oral narratives, most of the clauses which simply chronicle the action without commenting on it are linked by coordination or parataxis. In this story, the chain of co-ordinate clauses seems ironically appropriate for capturing the inexorable succession of states and events over which the narrator had no control. Relatively unimportant components (such as “made me stand in the middle of the room”) are not syntactically subordinated to the more central ones (such as “I was getting these pains across my chest”). Centrality does not have to be indicated syntactically since it is signaled by repetition and by intonation. Repetition of different kinds is used to highlight key elements. The immediate repetition of phrases, as in “it looked like worms it looked like worms coming out of my hands”(9) creates emphasis. Another focal matter — chest pain — is repeatedly mentioned: “I was getting these pains across my chest”(2), “and I felt these pains across my chest”(6), “and I just felt these pains across my chest”(10). Because this repetition is more widely spaced, it acts as a refrain, serving not only for emphasis, but also as a structurally linking thread.<sup>2</sup>

Where there is syntactic subordination in the complicating action it is mainly in the presentation of speech: quoted or reported speech forms the syntactic object of the verb ‘said’. More layered subordination is evident in sections of narrative providing temporal and spatial contextualization or evaluation of events, as in the

last part of sentence 7 and sentence 8 of Zubeida Jaffer's narrative, and in much of the following narrative by Ganief Allie (GA).

With regard to proportion of complicating action and contextualization, testifiers' narratives differed from one another. One of the factors governing the difference was the nature of the human rights violation being focused on. Narratives about protracted harassment or torture — such as those by Zubeida Jaffer and Colin de Souza — have more action to deal with, while narratives about instant and unexpected death often contain more material on the context of the death than on its actual occurrence, for obvious reasons. The latter type of narrative typically contains proportionately more complex sentences than the latter. Where the speaker self-corrects and where punctuation is not optimal, these narratives can be difficult to read. This is the case in the following extract which constitutes lines 41–68 of an 82 line chunk, presented as one paragraph. Its topic is the death of the narrator's brother. GA's brother (who had not been politically active, and had not been the target of police attention before the focal night) was shot by the police, an action that took a moment to inflict and one clause for GA to tell. In order to convey to his listeners just how shockingly unexpected and unprovoked the shooting of his brother was, GA sets out to evoke the context of that central moment.

“ (1) Eventually after five minutes or so, I decided look there is nothing going on, I am going inside. (2) He remained behind Hassan remained behind with Abdurahman, still on the premises and I went back into the house. (3) And I was not — I was about to touch the handle — but bear in mind there was no-one in sight in front where we were staying. (4) And as I touched the door handle, I just heard gunshots, I mean immediately I thought what's happening, who's shooting, why are they shooting? (5) But before I could do anything, he came running down the driveway, ran into the garage I think and I called out to him or he called out to me where is Abdurahman so he says he was lying on the floor of the garage. (6) So Abdurahman apparently manage to run down the lane, but what we didn't know was that more or less a position where — where the Commissioners are sitting now, more or less, maybe a meter or two further back, there is a wall at our place, exactly the same height. (7) And our opposite neighbor who also gave a statement Ms Adams, apparently saw the police hiding behind that wall, while I was standing there, and they were actually as I went out, they jumped up and they just shot at us. (8) Ms Adams before they fired — tried to phone us to say listen we didn't get the call, maybe because we were outside obviously we couldn't hear the phone ringing, but perhaps someone inside didn't think it was — I don't suppose there was enough time — was in a shock — but by the time I touched the handle and I came back, all of a sudden there was — there were policeman where they came from heaven knows. (9) And they shot Abdurahman<sup>3</sup> I mean four of them I would like to if I may I handed the names in to the Commission, I am going to mention their names, because I feel and maybe I am jumping the gun here because in the

inquest that followed, it was found and I have it here, no blame on rioters death, where they said, nobody could be held accountable for his death, yet four people shot an unarmed young man, in front of us for no reason whatsoever, and I mean he died instantly and the people who shot him, had the audacity to make a case against us and two weeks later myself and my brother was locked up and we were charged with public violence.”

Although twenty years had elapsed since his brother had been killed, his account suggests a vivid memory of the details, and he wants to incorporate them. One of the details, the touching of the door handle, acts as a refrain, appearing in (3), (4) and (8). In contrast with the refrain used by ZJ, this one does not focus on a central element of the narrative, but on an apparently trivial detail which serves as a temporal or spatial anchor (which is not uncommon in narratives of trauma — see Ochs and Capps 1996; Blommaert 2001b). It helps to indicate how quickly the literally and figuratively life-shattering event happened. When he was about to open the door, his brother was fine, just taking the air. As he reached for the door handle, the shooting broke out. Before he could open the door, his brother had been shot and killed.

In giving his account of the context, GA has to present a number of facets that were all simultaneously present in the moments before the shooting: where he and his two brothers were and why; where the police were and why; where other people were and why; what the various parties were aware of at the time. He uses gesture to indicate relative positioning (6). To capture simultaneity he uses complex sentences, as in (7) and (8). In (8) we see something that is typical of dense contextualization in TRC narratives, namely the insertion of what is known only in hindsight into the chronicle of events. In this case, there was an attempt to warn them about the police, which the narrator didn't know about at the time. Though (8) is difficult to read, it is easy to follow when heard because it is segmented by slight pauses and because GA moves to different pitch bands for the different levels of background information: what Ms Adams tried to do, when she tried to do it, and possible reasons why they didn't get her message. Then he reverts to the pitch band he had been using in “they jumped up and they just shot at us”.<sup>4</sup> Thus something which is fairly easy to process when heard can seem incoherent in print.

## 7. Conclusions

In societies marked by deep cleavages such as post-Apartheid South Africa, discourses on history are inscribed with traces of this history, and thus display features of past inequalities offered, here-and-now, in contexts where the abolition of

such inequalities is topical since it is a feature of the new societies. Spaces of equality are thus offered to people whose resources characterized past inequality. The TRC hearings are celebrations of precisely this phenomenon: hidden transcripts are explicitly elicited and offered to the nation as healing, cathartic narratives. The important point is to realize that offering such spaces does not in itself create more equality: it may accentuate past inequalities.

Consequently, 'going on record' — the discursive purpose of the TRC — is a complicated affair. The 'record' is historical, and generically conditioned so as to create 'history'. The official transcripts are there to be consulted afterwards as material documenting a phase in the history of South Africa; but this imposes criteria onto discourses: criteria of archivability, repeatability and quotability, in contexts that shift as society reforms itself and new moral, political, cultural norms become mainstream. It is thus likely (indeed, probably inevitable) that the stories are read and understood differently depending on when they are retrieved from the record. A reading in 2010 will be rather different from a reading in 1999: new generations of scholars will impose new interpretive grids on the texts and cull different messages from them accordingly. Researchers using the transcripts need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the problematic nature of the transcripts as record.

The challenge is to preserve as much history in the record as possible. This means: to preserve as many characteristics of the 'hidden' transcripts as possible, knowing that precisely their position as hidden transcripts prompted their elicitation and allowed their meaningfulness in the reconstruction of South African society. The TRC narratives are *situated*, they are based on specific conditions of production and reception particular to their historical moment of articulation. Careful discourse analysis can reconstruct voice, it can make them more easily interpretable, richer, clearer. But it needs to do so while warning against effacing that which was the reason for analysis: inequality in the narratives, in itself the most telling mark of Apartheid and the main structuring influence on the narratives. Creating a historical record cannot involve making transparent, ideally accessible documents: discourse analysis can demonstrate the difference between 'old' and 'historical', in which 'historical' stands for the historical situatedness of texts, their embeddedness in social and political economies of symbols and resources particular to a moment of speaking. If this distinction is not maintained, the chances that such narratives are 'heard' and understood properly diminish dramatically and only some narratives will last as 'memorable' ones: those that come closest to contemporary generic expectations and current moral, political and other codes. We hope to have shown empirically (though tentatively and far from comprehensively) the amount of work needed to create such a record. We have used in our attempt a linguistics enriched with anthropological and sociological perspectives



on communication, and we believe that only this kind of linguistics is up to the task: a linguistics that looks into processes of production as well as into their products, and a linguistics that avoids John Thompson's famous 'fallacy of internalism' (Thompson 1990), the illusion that the power and impact of discourses can be read straight off their words.

## Notes

1. This was confirmed in conversation with one of the commissioners.
2. Another common type of repetition is not stylistic, but a feature of the stop-start processes of formulating and monitoring one's speech (as in "and I — and I felt ..." (6)). It can be disconcerting to readers because it is normally edited out of written narratives (unless it is represented as a feature of dialogue and punctuated as such).
3. Note that the description of this central event, the killing of AA, is not punctuated as a separate sentence, nor is it given prominence as the last sentence in a paragraph.
4. What is clear on tape but not in the transcript is that "was in a shock" is said by someone else, not GA. Transcribers do not always indicate change of speaker.

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# Critical discourse analysis as an analytic tool in considering selected, prominent features of TRC testimonies

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This chapter considers a number of salient, characterising features of the verbal mediation process that took place in the TRC hearings on gross human rights violations. This is done with reference to the methodology developed in Discourse Sociolinguistics. It considers how various participants represent a particular event, each taking the perspective from which they experienced it. It notes the differences in verbal choice, and in textual and information structure of (i.a.) a journalist who witnessed this particular instance of public police excess, of a woman involved because her home was at the scene of the confrontation between police and youngsters, of one of the commanding police officers who had been subpoenaed and thus was not a voluntary witness at the hearing, of a doctor who treated patients after the event, of a school teacher who could articulate the particular kind of protest youngsters engaged in at the time, and so on. It also highlights a particular practice of reformulating which appears to be typical of discourses that mediate past atrocities with a view to founding new and improved democratic practices.

## Introduction

One of the aims of sociolinguistic research is to improve understanding of the various ways in which language and society are related. Sociolinguists work with the assumption that language reflects structures of society, and conversely, that language also affects structures of society. Various researchers (Kress and Hodge 1979; Fowler et al. 1979; De Beaugrande and Dressler 1981; Van Dijk 1981, 1984; Wodak 1989; Fairclough 1989, 1995) have made it clear that language is not a neutral instrument — it has an active interpretative and constructive function, in that the linguistic means speakers choose actually contribute to shaping the entities they are referring to. These views on how language shapes perceptions, events

and even people, are endorsed by scholars in the social sciences, such as Berger and Luckmann (1966) who work with a well substantiated and widely recognised theory on the social construction of reality.

The constructive role of language often goes unnoticed — language is such a natural part of everyday life that it becomes transparent; not all users reflect on the choices they have, the choices others make, and the implications and effects of various linguistic choices. Considering the consciously or subconsciously made linguistic choices of speakers within a critical framework, critical discourse analysts do not attempt only to describe and explain the patterns they find; such researchers also become engaged by asking questions that address issues of social justice. This is particularly the case when we consider linguistic and societal processes related to the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa from 1996 to 1998.

Linguistic research of the past two or three decades has produced a number of different critical approaches to engaged discourse analysis. The grammatical theory on which such critical discourse analysis relies is generally Systemic Functional Grammar. Scholars working on a macro-level, reflecting on the structure of larger units of text, often invoke the Hallidayan meta-functions, considering how interpersonal, ideational and textual meanings are instantiated. For a discussion of some salient features of selected discourses produced during TRC hearings, this chapter will draw particularly on the theoretical framework termed Discourse Sociolinguistics, developed by Ruth Wodak and a number of other Critical Discourse Analysts in Vienna. (cf. Wodak, R., Nowak, P., Pelikan, J., Gruber, H., DeCillia, R. and Mitten, R. 1990; Wodak, R. and Matouschek, B. 1993; Wodak, R., Menz, F., Mitten, R. and Stern, F. 1994)

The chapter will be ordered as follows: first I shall give some contextual information on the event which is in focus in the selected discourses. The ‘Trojan Horse event’ took place in 1985, and was investigated and opened to public scrutiny by the TRC in 1997. Second, I shall consider how this event was verbally mediated during public hearings of the TRC. I shall explain a number of salient features of Discourse Sociolinguistics, and indicate how this theory can assist in better understanding the nature of mediated, reconciliatory discourses where perpetrators of human rights violations and those shattered by such violations meet in a public and officially monitored space. Third, I shall refer to selected excerpts of the Trojan Horse discourses, to highlight (i) specific features of the linguistic form and information structure of testimonies of various witnesses to the Trojan Horse incident, and (ii) practices of re-formulation used by mediating TRC officials. Finally, the effects of the linguistic choices of the different participants will be presented.

## 2. The Trojan Horse Incident

In broad terms, this chapter will analyse discourses that give different perspectives on an incident that took place in October 1985 and that was an instantiation of the conflict between a highly politicised, disenfranchised and otherwise disadvantaged community and the state. In this case the confrontation was between a group of unruly youngsters and the police in very tense circumstances, where the youngsters had been sensitised by a history of brutalisation and the authorities were experiencing loss of the inordinate measure of control they had become accustomed to.

This chapter will refer to discourses recorded during the Trojan Horse hearings of the TRC that took place in Athlone, Cape Town in May 1997. They comprise of testimonies that reported and reconstructed the experience of people involved in a particularly violent confrontation between residents of Athlone and the police. The event around which the discourses are centred had enormous implications not only for the individuals directly affected, but for the whole community in which it occurred. At the time it was reported in the media, and it gave rise to a number of court cases that were also given wide media coverage. Consequently, this event had a larger ripple-effect than similar cases that were kept from public scrutiny by the censorship regulations of the late 1980s. It occurred at a time of intensifying public protest against government policies and practices, shortly before South Africa entered a period of five years of emergency law.

Briefly, the circumstances that gave rise to mediation of the 'Trojan Horse incident' were the following:

By the 1980s, most public channels for expressing protest against apartheid were closed or, at best, limited due to the banning of the majority of political organisations. Public organisations that supported the liberation movement and were not banned were constantly harassed so that their views were often suppressed. Various forms of civil disobedience resulted. One feature of the protests of these years was the participation of youngsters, many of whom were, in terms of the legal system, children, aged between 10/11 and 18 years. In the townships, protest often took the form of youngsters blockading streets with self-constructed barriers, such as burning tyres, to prevent entry by the police. Another form of protest was for youngsters to throw stones at passing vehicles. This proved to be difficult for the police to control: those responsible for the stoning could run away and disappear before they were apprehended because they had community protection. Understandably, the police found this frustrating and embarrassing.

On the afternoon of 15 October, "plain clothes" policemen hiding in crates and armed with live ammunition on the back of an open SATS delivery truck,

were sent into Athlone. The police apparently intended to provoke stoning and then to respond in a way that would deter continuation of such a form of public protest. As the first stone hit the front of the truck, police emerged from the back and fired, killing three, injuring quite a number more. This was not an isolated incident — testimony was given that indicated this kind of police action occurred more than once. What made the incident remarkable in this instance was that it was captured on TV film by a South African journalist working for a foreign network. Thus it was not only recorded visually, but also broadcast across the globe in the next 24 hours. It provided damning evidence that police would provoke improper conduct and then show neither discretion nor reasonable restraint in their response.

### 3. Verbal mediation of the Trojan Horse Incident 12 years later

The event was reported immediately, both abroad and in the local news media. What had happened was reflected from many different angles: there were reports of what had happened, discussions of the effects, justification of the police conduct, criticism of the police conduct, fragments of individuals' narrative reconstructions, discussions of the TV broadcast, and so on. Soon afterwards legal processes were introduced, first in the form of an official inquest and later in the form of a private murder charge against the police officers. These were also reported in the media. In these cases the families of the deceased distinctly felt that the legal system had failed them, that the police and officers of justice had acted without integrity and that much had remained improperly concealed.

Twelve years later the Trojan Horse incident was revisited in the process of TRC investigations of human rights abuses. Transcriptions of the TRC proceedings include written representations of the oral testimonies of people personally traumatised by the events, and of the implicated police officers. Again, media reports covered the hearings, so that there was renewed public mediation of this incident. A brief overview of how the field identified as *Critical Discourse Analysis* has developed, and what specifically distinguishes *Discourse Sociolinguistics* within this field, will serve to place the theoretical framework for the analysis of the Trojan Horse texts.

### 4. Discourse Sociolinguistics

By the end of the 1980s Critical Linguistics (CL) was able to describe its aims, research interests, chosen perspective and methods of analysis much more specifically

and rigidly than earlier on. Wodak (1989) explained and illustrated the most important characteristics of critical linguistic research as they had become established across two decades of research within such a critical framework. An interest in features of discourses rather than in smaller or in decontextualised units of language use, resulted in the critical approach being termed specifically *Critical Discourse Analysis* (cf. Fairclough 1995; Titscher et al. 2000; Wodak and Meyer 2001). The relevance of investigating language use in institutional settings was reiterated, and a new focus on the necessity of a historical perspective was introduced. A variety of research projects into discursive practices in institutional contexts that would assist in developing an integrated theory of critical discourse analysis followed. These include studies written up with telling titles such as “*Wir sind alle unschuldige Täter*” (We are all offenders who are not guilty) (Wodak et al. 1990), “We are dealing with people whose origins one can clearly tell just by looking” (Wodak and Matouschek 1993), and “*Notwendige Maßnahmen gegen Fremde*” (Inevitable Measures against Foreigners) (Matouschek, Wodak and Januschek 1995).

Wodak (1995a) shows how scholars who have engaged in linguistic, semiotic and discourse analyses from different scholarly backgrounds, share a particular perspective in which the concepts of power, ideology and history figure centrally. Eventually, in *Disorders of Discourse*, Wodak (1996) draws on the empirical basis formed by a large collection of specific studies, to formulate what she terms *Discourse Sociolinguistics*.

The term *Discourse Sociolinguistics* is used for distinguishing what is also referred to as the discourse-historical method of critical discourse analysis developed by Wodak and members of her Applied Language Studies research group in Vienna (1995, 1996, 1997). This particular framework accepts a set of general principles which take specific features of the production and reception of discourses into consideration. Such principles refer to the understanding of discourse as a social practice which may function in constructing, reproducing or transforming society, and of discourses as historically situated processes that can only be properly understood in relation to the context (Titscher et al. 1998: 180, 181).

This approach considers characteristics of communication in a variety of institutions (cf. Wodak 1995c) such as embassies, courts, schools, psychiatric institutions and hospital clinics, and analyses discourses marked by more and less explicit forms of racism (e.g. Wodak and Reisigl 2000; Wodak and Van Dijk 2000), sexism (e.g. Wodak 1997) and contemporary anti-Semitism (e.g. Wodak 1997). A significant amount of research has also been done on discourses in various kinds of media, such as radio news, television interviews and newspaper reporting. The method of analysis that crystallised out of this research has been termed the discourse-historical method (Wodak 1995a, 1990; Wodak and Reisigl 2000).



#### 4.1 Characterising features of Discourse Sociolinguistics

Discourse Sociolinguistics is generally characterised by its assumption that texts, rather than sentences, are primary units of communication, that the meaning of texts cannot be properly described and explained without consideration of social context, and that power relations are central in determining the form of texts (Wodak 1996). In this section I shall elaborate on the distinctive features of a Discourse Sociolinguistic analytic approach and I shall indicate (i) how the TRC discourses as a particular kind of institutional discourse, are suited to be analysed within such a framework, and (ii) how the discourses that topicalised the Trojan Horse incident may be illuminated by such analysis.

##### 4.1.1 *Interest in language and social inequality*

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has since its earliest ventures been explicit about its interest in the language of dominance, of power, of sensitive social issues. It set out to disclose how language functions not only in shaping societal patterns, but also in shaping the mindset that underpins and enables individuals and groups to affirm particular social practices. Most scholars working in CDA have at some stage expressed the aim of demystifying social processes that allow for injustice, inequality, abuse of power, misleading large audiences, and so on (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995; Van Dijk 1984, 1985; Kress 1990; Wodak 1989, 1996). Discourse Sociolinguistics supports and elaborates this interest in the functions language may fulfil in the social distribution of power.

The TRC discourses were generated in the process of recalling and trying to fathom circumstances and events of gross human rights abuse during the period 1960 to 1994 (Tutu 1999: 64). The TRC hearings intended to allow victims and relatives of victims to voice formerly denied, trivialised or criminalised experience, as well as to bring perpetrators of various forms of violence to articulate their understanding of their own role at the time. In the sequence of texts considered in this chapter, the inequality between a powerful state represented by disguised, armed policemen and youngsters hurling stones at passing vehicles, is evident. The discourses testify to verbal and non-verbal forms of state violence experienced when police on an unmarked vehicle provoked and then lashed out at angry and unruly youngsters, a curious crowd and the residents who happened to live in the area of the action.

The selected excerpts from the Trojan Horse texts show an interesting shift in power: in 1985 Mr. V was in a position to use live ammunition in the pursuit of apprehending teenage “ringleaders”; in the court cases that followed he was protected by the position he held in relation to the government and armed forces. Such positions afforded him a degree of security that those traumatised by the

shootings did not experience. At the TRC hearing the tables appear to be turned. Mr. V finds himself in a considerably less powerful position, which is textually marked: he does not testify freely; he reads from a carefully prepared text. His testimony starts with a request for permission to continue. He introduces himself in terms of his current position as “security advisor” and only later refers to the more powerful position he occupied in 1985. He starts out by motivating his involuntary participation in the hearing: “I was approached ... and notified that I would have to ...” The testimony of what happened is given in terms where his own actions are described as impassively as possible: e.g. rather than signifying his own authority and agency with “I issued 9mm pistols” he conceals his commanding position with “the persons under my command were, on instructions of L, given 9mm pistols”.

#### 4.1.2 *Text as basic unit*

CL and CDA have been explicit about their interest in units of language larger than the sentence (Wodak 1989: xiii). In fact, Wodak (1996: 5) characterises the shift in scholarly interest from the linguistic unit of sentence to the communicative unit of text and “text in context” as one of the major developments in the field since the 1980s. Discourse Sociolinguistics follows other CDA approaches in considering the structural and communicative properties of larger units of language rather than the properties of sentences and constituents of sentences that are in focus in traditional grammatical analysis. Beyond considering the significance of particular sentence constituents and their functions (e.g. words selected, processes of nominalisation or lexicalisation, syntactically significant phenomena such as word order), primary attention is given to textual categories, their constituents and functions.

The discourses under scrutiny in this paper were produced during hearings that lasted a couple of days. The proceedings were recorded and transcribed by persons officially contracted by the TRC. The transcriptions are lengthy texts, and analysis here can refer only to fragments of these large units of communication. Nevertheless, it is clear that not only the discourses of the days of the hearings are in issue; other texts referring to the Trojan Horse event, such as media reports, police records, court proceedings, narratives told and retold in the various communities, are invoked. We are working here with discourses produced orally, often intertextually linked to previously recorded and published texts. The spoken discourses, recorded and transcribed (often fairly intuitively and not necessarily precisely), are analysed as texts embedded in and related to larger discursive units. Attention to intra-sentential structures (e.g. use of insertion sequences as in “*there was a crowd of — oh, I don’t really remember, the crowd is maybe 60 or 80 people*” — Excerpt 1) or details of vocabulary (e.g. in rephrasing witnesses’ narratives, transforming “I

could not help her ... I did not say to her ...” into “(you) ignore(d) ... that you had been shot” — Excerpt 4) is related throughout to the larger textual unit.

#### 4.1.3 *The importance of context*

Discourse Sociolinguistics is not only “dedicated to the study of text in context, but also affords both factors equal importance” (Wodak 1996: 3). Earlier sociolinguistic analysis considered context in terms of variables such as class, gender, ethnicity and age without attention to situational, cognitive or emotional factors regarding speakers and audience. In this approach the notion of context has been developed to include relevant aspects of the personalities, biographies and social roles of the interactants, as well as the situatedness of a discourse in time and space, the institution in which it takes place and even larger societal patterns and processes such as the effects of laws, of disruptive historical events, national and international trends, and so on.

Determining the boundaries of context raises the problem of ‘infinite regress’ that was also a concern of Cicourel (Wodak 1996: 21, 22). Goffman’s concept of ‘frame’ is invoked to distinguish between the overall organisation of a particular social activity and the local dimension of context where consideration is given to more specific circumstances in which a discourse emerges and which are in part created by the discourse itself. Bringing historical data of a personal and societal nature into the notion of context is a specific contribution of the scholars of Discourse Sociolinguistics. Analysts are encouraged to be explicit, on the one hand, about which aspects of context are included for consideration and which not, and, on the other hand, about the grounds on which the selected contextual features are taken to be significant.

The historic context of the Trojan Horse discourses refers to the general history of the struggle for majority rule in the latter part of the 20th century in South Africa, to the particular history of the intensification of resistance during the 1980s, to the local history of resistance and suppression in urban communities in the Western Cape, and then to the particular history of a single significant event that became one of a limited number of ‘special events’ that gained iconic meaning in a number of ways. This event was publicly mediated in a time when media restrictions prohibited dissemination of such information. The publicity obliged official investigation into police conduct, and even if the outcome was disappointing to those who experienced loss and injury during the event, the Trojan Horse incident became an indicator of violent oppression of the old regime and a publicly visible test case for the new regime’s provision of restitution.

To understand the nature of the Trojan Horse discourses, it is important to know the historic circumstance that the TRC was established by the post-1994

government for a number of specific purposes, such as “national reconciliation”, “restitution”, “amnesty”, “coming to terms with the past”. It is also important to recognise that the overall organisation of the hearings created a context that contributed to structural peculiarities of the discourses. These include features such as prepared (as opposed to spontaneously produced) oral narratives, prepared written narratives read out aloud, leading questions by commissioners, interruptions to guide witnesses, to bring them back to certain points, to express support for or doubt about particular disclosures, stilted articulation, repetition, regular reformulation by witnesses or by commissioners, and so on. I shall return to some of these in the analysis in Section 5 below.

#### 4.1.4 *Developing knowledge that will demystify*

Discourse Sociolinguistics does not focus on language for the sake of an interest in linguistic structure only. It particularly takes an interest in “the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures” to disclose power relations and “the kind of communication and non-communication” to which they lead (Wodak 1996: 17, 18). Thus, Discourse Sociolinguistics intends to interpret and explain the discursive nature of social relations and the constitutive function of discourse in society. It does this through systematic and thorough investigation of a specific range of discourses that often communicate more than one would notice at a first glance. A ‘multi-method approach’ and ‘multi-level analysis’ (Wodak 1996: 23) is suggested in the quest to disclose the intended and actual meanings and effects of texts produced in circumstances of social conflict. Knowledge of methods that can be properly accounted for as well as knowledge of social and linguistic processes that mystify or demystify, has resulted from this particular scholarly approach (cf. Wodak and Van Dijk 2000; Muntigl, Weiss and Wodak 2000; Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Fairclough 2003).

The aim of the TRC’s public hearings was to bring traumatic histories into the public consciousness in a way that would recognise suffering, facilitate healing and bring clarity on concealed or denied aspects of human rights abuses. By confronting earlier discourses that justified state violence, a particular version of the struggle history could be retold in a way that would expose a number of popular myths. The discourses at the TRC hearings were specifically structured to question earlier constructions in a way that would demystify the role of the state machinery and the participation of individual perpetrators in clearly abusive or violent actions. These discourses were biased towards recognising the injustices suffered by those affected, and to obliging those responsible for suffering to disclose full particulars. The aim was to offer an opportunity for closure and still consider the accountability of offenders (cf. Du Toit 2000: 122ff.; Boraine 2000: 7, 9). In the analysis of

the Trojan Horse discourses we may consider how public discourses before 1994 attempted to construct what had happened in such a way that any blame on the police was removed, and that even accidental bystanders were constructed as responsible for the devastating event. The hearings became a new kind of public discourse that intended to demystify the language of power, of denying responsibility and denying participation in injustice. In turn, analysis of the TRC discourses has to disclose how various witnesses presented themselves, others and events under scrutiny — even discourses aimed at “full disclosure” need to be demystified.

#### 4.1.5 *Disorders of Discourse*

If language is characterised as a tool for communication and demonstrated to be a complex, sophisticated tool that functions remarkably well, then one has to ask how pervasive instances of miscommunication are to be explained. Where communication does not succeed, or achieves less than was intended, there is evidence of some form of disorder. Likewise, where communication has an intended but improper effect, such as misleading, maliciously concealing, humiliating or inciting violence, there is some form of disorder. Discourse Sociolinguistics takes a particular interest in such ‘disorders of discourse’ (Wodak 1996, 1997).

The term ‘disorders of discourse’ refers back to Foucault’s use of it in his 1970 inaugural lecture, where he points out the “primary disorder and violence of discourse”, the powers and dangers of which need to be subdued by sets of rules and conventions (Wodak 1996: 24, 25). Further, the term ‘disorders of discourse’ refers intertextually to the notion ‘orders of discourse’ introduced into CDA by Fairclough (1995: 55) to denote the set of discursive types incorporated in the communicative conventions of a social institution or social domain. Much attention in text analysis and discourse analysis has been devoted to the systematicity and regularity of large communicative units of language (cf. De Beaugrande and Dressler 1981). In Discourse Sociolinguistics attention is turned to the systematicity and regularity of communicative mishaps of various kinds.

The TRC discourses contained many ‘disorders’: the narratives of various participants in the same events often gave conflicting details; witnesses recalling traumatic experiences would become distraught and confused; from time to time narratives became disjointed and incoherent. In the analysis of the Trojan Horse discourses I shall consider some of the disorders that characterised these narratives. Traumatized witnesses would omit information or err in giving the chronology of their experiences. For example, ZR in Excerpt 2 below refers to the disruption she encountered in her kitchen, and directly after that reports “I was then taken away”. She omits any reference to her own breaking down and eventually having to be institutionalised for intensive psychological treatment and care.

Anxious perpetrators may be meticulous about the chronology, reading carefully considered details of what came first and what followed, what was cause and what was effect (cf. Excerpt 3 below). Such care could be telling of an attempt to conceal, to redirect attention, to distract from other more pertinent foci, and thus also reflect a disorder in the discourse.

#### 4.1.6 *Institutional language use*

Considering the interest of CDA in the ways in which language mediates power relations in society, the Discourse Sociolinguistic focus on institutional language use is not surprising. Sociological research has indicated that since the 1950s, societal structures have seen a shift from power centred in strong, charismatic individuals to power centred in less personalised institutions. Thus, societal patterns that attribute positions of control to certain groups or individuals are maintained in that these patterns are established in institutions that seem to have a life of their own. Challenging and changing such patterns is more difficult than bringing about change simply by replacing an individual whose pattern of governance may become contested.

Institutional discourse is seen as a form of social action which reflects the essence, aims, attitudes and functions of a particular organisation, and at the same time constructs all these features of the organisation. Discourse Sociolinguistics is interested in the “whole set of interwoven, conflicting discourses which construct and establish multiple relationships” that exist within institutions (Wodak 1996: 12). It aims to make transparent the “explicit and implicit rules and power structures in socially important domains” (Wodak 1995c: 207). It does this through looking at textual features such as the preferred styles and communicative strategies, technical registers used, and so on. In addition, it also looks at contextual features such as the history, culture, physical setting and specific features of real communication inside of the institution or between the institution and interested outsiders.

The TRC was an institution established by the government to authorise a process of confronting, working through, memorising and memorialising recent events that threatened to destroy national unity. Analysing the Trojan Horse discourses is to some extent an analysis of the language of this institution. I shall consider features of the discursive contributions of various participants that specifically mark them as institutional in that they articulate the essence, aims and attitudes most pertinent to the TRC. TRC discourses generally will also bear traces of the language of state mechanisms within which some of the participants were employed at the time of the event in 1985 and the language of legal institutions involved in testing the particular case prior to the TRC hearings.

#### 4.1.7 *The language of politics and ideology*

Considering that governments are generally the most powerful institutions in modern society,<sup>1</sup> it is to be expected that many of the discourses in which CDA takes an interest will be from domains of governmental decision-making, or at the interface where government communicates with other institutions or with lay persons affected by their policies and actions. The term 'politics' is taken broadly to refer to matters of policy in a wide range of institutions that develop implicit and explicit sets of rules determining the culture, acceptable behaviour, work ethos, operational strategies, and so on. They generally expect all members of the institution to adhere to such 'politics' of the institution. CDA accepts that matters of policy are often intended to regulate power relations and that they are negotiated, established, maintained or changed through discursive means (Titscher et al. 1998: 180, 181). Discourse Sociolinguistics is interested in disclosing the ways in which language functions to entrench ideologies as they are embodied in politics. This does not imply that all discourse is ideological or that all discursive disorders are to be ascribed to political ideology.<sup>2</sup> Prejudices and attitudes, norms and values that cannot on their own be characterised as ideology may also contribute to miscommunication of various kinds.

The TRC confronted both present and past politics and ideologies. The TRC discourses could not avoid reflecting this. In the Trojan Horse discourses, the politics of supporting those who suffered human rights abuses and of challenging those who were apparently perpetrators of such abuses are manifest. Excerpts 4 to 7 below illustrate how officials questioning the witnesses create space in the discourse for positive presentation of those positioned against the security forces of the former regime. Excerpt 8 shows how Mr. V, a former member of the security forces whose prepared statement was presented orderly, even if tersely, becomes a bit flustered when he has to answer the commissioner's questions. The commissioner does not allow time for him to regain composure or offer any other form of support.

#### 4.1.8 *Interdisciplinarity*

The acceptance of a broad notion of context as condition for arriving at a reliable rendering and useful analysis of the communicative achievements of a particular discourse virtually dictates an interdisciplinary approach in Discourse Sociolinguistics. If we are to consider, for example, historic events and cognitive processes as part of the active context of a discourse, we need to draw on knowledge and insights from the disciplines primarily researching such events and processes. CDA and Discourse Sociolinguistics acknowledge a degree of interdependency in relation to other disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, history, anthropology

and literary theory. There is recognition of the value that advances made in these disciplines may have for improved understanding of the functioning of language in society. For understanding the patterns of language use in TRC discourses, such recognition of the contribution of other disciplines is also essential.

This chapter considers mostly textual features of the Trojan Horse discourses. It is, however, useful to bear in mind that the functions of particular discursive practices may be highlighted and investigated in other disciplines as well. What our analysis concludes may be corroborated, corrected or enriched by analysis of the same material from the perspective of e.g. a psychologist or anthropologist. It has been noted (cf. Swartz 1996, 1998) that discursive practices, such as those indicating loss of memory, those used to avoid reference to trauma (compare the discourse of ZR in excerpt 2) or those used in re-phrasing (as illustrated in excerpts 4 to 8 and discussed in paragraph 5 below), may be used in diagnosis and in therapy.

#### 4.1.9 *Intertextuality*

Wodak (1996: 11, 19) refers to intertextuality as a defining feature of discourses, indicating that every discourse is in some way related synchronically and diachronically to other discourses. This has at least two implications for discourse sociolinguistics. First, it is clear that discourses related to the one under investigation form part of the broader context that needs to be considered. Practically this would indicate that other discourses of the same participants, and discourses produced in related institutions on similar topics need to be taken into consideration. Second, it is clear that hardly any discourse can be self-contained. In fact, it is difficult to designate an objective beginning or end to any discourse, as each is connected to discourses that went before and that will follow. This places an obligation on the researcher to be explicit about how particular units were selected, what the specific research question is, and what information relates to the question in such a way that it is indispensable for the particular analysis (Wodak 1996: 14, 21). The intertextual aspect of discourse draws on the knowledge participants share of other texts than the one in process. Not only knowledge of other texts, but also knowledge of other registers, which lie outside the immediate writer/reader – speaker/hearer link, form part of the intertextuality of a discourse. A discourse refers and responds to other discourses by introducing traces of the other, leaving clues for the audience as to which particular knowledge is assumed to be shared (Fowler 1996: 204, 205).

The Trojan Horse case was reported in the media, and was tested in inquiries and court hearings. The TRC hearing related to this case could not avoid referring to, drawing on, repeating and contesting such earlier discourses. A strong



element of intertextuality was manifest in all the discourses investigated for this analysis. Considering the generic features of these discourses, one would do well to attend to the features of discourses produced elsewhere in settings of national, institutional processes seeking the truth and mediating reconciliation after gross human rights abuses. References to such processes in Argentine and Chile have often been used in motivating the South African choice to deal with a contested past through a TRC (Crocker 2000: 109).<sup>3</sup> In a more extensive investigation it would be interesting to compare various texts dealing with the same matter but produced at different times, for different purposes, for different audiences. For example, a comparison of media reports, court reports and the TRC transcripts may give insight into what was in focus at various stages of mediating the Trojan Horse event, how various participants are identified by others and what self-identity they project. To identify and recognise defining properties of public reconciliatory discourses<sup>4</sup> generally, one would need to consider how processes elsewhere dealt with events similar to the Trojan Horse event, the Gugulethu Seven incident,<sup>5</sup> the Cradock Four,<sup>6</sup> and so on. In the analysis given in 5 below the aspect of intertextuality is only limitedly attended to.

#### 4.2 Categories used in discourse-historical analysis

Five types of discursive strategies used in positive self- and negative other-presentation have been identified as rhetorical means used in discourses of discrimination (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 44ff.). These will be briefly discussed here as they appear to be useful in the analysis of the selected Trojan Horse discourses.

##### 4.2.1 *Referential strategies*

These are strategies by which social actors are verbally represented. Persons or groups are named, and then also constructed, in ways that convey either disparaging or creditable connotations.

##### 4.2.2 *Predicational strategies*

These strategies are used to attach positive or negative evaluations to social actors in the form of implicit or explicit predicates.

##### 4.2.3 *Argumentation strategies*

These strategies serve to justify positive or negative attributions signalled in labeling, and they are used to justify suggested social and political inclusion or exclusion of the identified actors.

#### 4.2.4 *Perspectivation, framing strategies*

Speakers use these strategies to position themselves and to explain the perspective they have on a given set of events.

#### 4.2.5 *Intensifying/mitigating strategies*

These two strategies are used “to qualify and modify the epistemic status of a proposition”. They are used to enhance or subdue the force of identifying utterances, in accordance with the perspective the speaker wishes to promote.

### 5. Analysis of Trojan Horse discourses

#### 5.1 Differences within the genre

This section will consider the selected TRC testimonies as representative of a particular genre, considering discourses produced by actors in different witness roles. The texts (*cf. selected excerpts in addendum A*) carry reference to the same event, and they were presented in very similar contexts: in the course of public hearings set up by the TRC as ‘special event hearings’, where a panel of commissioners who had been briefed on the basic facts of an event, and who had insight into research findings, introduced, questioned and listened to specifically invited witnesses.

Particularly interesting here are the differences between the testimonies of those witnesses that voluntarily approached the commission and those that were subpoenaed to testify. Besides TRC commissioners and other officials, the participants in these discourses were witnesses of three kinds, namely (i) journalists present at the scene of the Trojan Horse incident on 15 October 1985 (*cf. excerpt 1*), (ii) members of the community traumatised by the events of that day (*cf. excerpt 2*), (iii) members of the police identified as perpetrators in the violent action of the incident (*cf. excerpt 3*). The latter group had been subpoenaed, and they were assisted by legal representatives.

Notable textual differences in the testimonies of the various categories of witnesses illustrate how the choices of language producers construct different interpersonal relations and render different representations of reality. In this way, the social experiences of participants and of a community are discursively constructed. Most telling in the selected Trojan Horse discourses are, on a micro-level, lexical and syntactic differences, and, on a macro-level, differences in the organisation of information.

All the testimonies were presented orally. Due to the particular way in which the hearings were organised, participants came prepared to give their account of what happened on the day of the Trojan Horse shooting and to answer questions related

to their participation in the event. Nevertheless, there were significant differences in that the journalist had a written statement which he did not read — he retold what he had written, selecting what he considered to be pertinent to the circumstances; the ‘survivor’-testimony was not based on a written text — the witness in this case drew on her memory and addressed the commissioners as if unaware that they already had had access to many of the details; the ‘perpetrator’-testimony took the form of reading from a written statement without deviating or adding comment unless the interrogating commissioner requested that.

The introduction of the journalist, though orderly and articulate, has typical features of spontaneous oral texts: the utterances rarely represent full, grammatical sentences, as in “... *we were responding to some — we all carried pagers ...*”, “*We all hurtled down there, there was a number of journalists there and TV crews, ...*” and “... *there was a crowd of — oh, I don’t really remember, the crowd is maybe 60 or 80 people of which a small sections were throwing stones ...*”.

The ‘survivor’-testimony starts out in a similar way, referring to the day in question, using incomplete and ungrammatical sentences, such as “*On the 15th October 1985, that day I will never forget*”, or “*One of the friends of my children did not want, wanted to go home ...*” However, very soon the narrative becomes disjointed, betraying the emotional state of the witness. Attention is given to feelings and perceptions, chronology seems to be abandoned, signalling that accuracy as to what happened and in which order, is secondary to the effects of the physical events. There is repetition on the one hand (“*I could see that things would go wrong ...*”, “... *I could see that something was going wrong.*”), and on the other hand there are gaps (“... *he came into the house with his rifle. One child was under the dressing table ...*”, “...*glasses in the kitchen were broken with the shots that were fired. I was then taken away.*”). The narrative is wordy and imprecise, and yet conveys much of the disruption, dismay and experience of losing control inside her own home as a result of events that started out in the street and spilled into this family home.

The ‘perpetrator’-testimony starts very formally with a personal introduction (“*I, D— V—, hereby state under oath. I am an adult male and ...*”) and then continues with a neatly ordered, carefully worded account of how things had developed. The witness gives a succinct account, summarising first what he finds to be the critical aspects of the event, and then elaborating in the body of his statement. There are hardly any incomplete or ungrammatical sentences, references are very specific. Also, untypical of spoken language, there is a barrage of complex sentences with carefully embedded clauses, as in “*I was approached by the Investigative Unit of the Truth Commission and notified that I would have to appear before the Commission on ... (date) ... to give evidence and to answer questions relating to the so-called Trojan Horse incident which took place on the 15th of October 1985 in*

*Athlone, in which ... (names) ... died and others were injured.*” As becomes evident in the process of interrogation, in spite of giving fine details twelve years after the event, this narrative is neither completely clear nor frank in all respects.

## 5.2 Self- and other-identification

The discursive strategies referred to in 4.2 above are used by speakers to identify and position themselves and others. The text fragments collected in addendum A serve again to illustrate these uses.

The journalist witness identifies himself as one of a group just doing his job like all others, e.g. “*We lived ...*”, “*we all carried pagers ...*”, “*we responded ...*”, “*We filmed ...*” His first reference to the police activity is indirect and impersonal as in “*this yellow truck approached*”, “*... it was a South African Railways truck*”, “*It went through the crowd ...*” This has a distancing effect, which creates an impression of objectivity. Only later in his narrative does he give more personal reference to specific individuals shooting or being shot at.

The ‘survivor’-witness identifies herself more by what she thought and what she said than by what she did (“*I invited them ...*”, “*I told him ...*”, “*I was convinced ...*”, “*I screamed ...*”). Her predicative strategy in portraying the policeman, does the opposite: he is introduced in concrete, active terms as “*fat*” and as one who “*kicked*” and “*grabbed*”.

The ‘perpetrator’-witness identifies himself directly and explicitly, giving his name — even mentioning the obvious, that he is an “*adult male*”. Using a perspectivisation strategy, he explains that he had been *approached* by the Investigative Unit of the TRC and *notified* that he would have to give evidence. This makes it clear that his testimony is involuntary, that he would prefer to give no more than is minimally required. He does not refer directly to the other witnesses — journalists or members of families whose homes were accidentally positioned in the vicinity of the shootings. To him the ‘others’ in this narrative are “*ringleaders*”, “*attackers*” who habitually obstructed vehicles, stoning them, slashing tyres, setting them alight. That the police had set out deliberately to attract stoning and that none of the other suggested actions to deter the protesting youngsters were attempted, is not brought into his construction of himself or the others. Mr. V’s testimony uses a range of argumentation strategies (e.g. “*Quite a few arrests were in fact made*”), as well as intensifying strategies when he refers to the danger they were in on the day in question (e.g. “*There was no doubt in my mind ... we would probably not emerge from this attack alive*”), and mitigating strategies when he justifies the actions he took (e.g. “*experience had taught us ...*”, “*From experience I knew ...*”).

### 5.3 Re-constructing experience by re-phrasing

I shall refer to the excerpts in Addendum A to illustrate linguistic practices of rephrasing by commissioners, and how they function to re-construct narrated experience. This will illustrate how verbal mediation determines the way in which an event may become part of the collective memory, and how this may reshape personal experiences to make them more meaningful, to fit a framework that the experiencer can better deal with, and to integrate the experience in a way that is healing<sup>7</sup> rather than disruptive and fragmenting.

Excerpts 4 to 7 give fragments of the testimonies of different people in which they refer to themselves and their own actions in obviously trying circumstances. In each case the commissioner refers to the words chosen by the witness, but then re-phrases by choosing new forms of reference, predication, argumentation, and so on. This gives a new perspective, frames the event in a way that constructs the witnesses more positively than they do themselves. This assists in achieving one of the TRC aims, namely in bringing about some form of psychological repair for individuals and communities.

Mrs. R had testified *"I could see that something was going wrong. I invited (the children) into the house and I closed the door..."* The commissioner returns to this later, and interprets what had happened, as follows: *"Let's look at the shooting itself because you were in a sense keeping those children safe"*. *"Inviting the children in"* is, in a process of textual intervention (cf. Pope 1995), re-phrased as *"keeping the children safe"*. Similarly, Mrs. R's reference in excerpt 4 to her *"not say(ing) to (Mrs. A) that I had been shot"*, is re-phrased as having *"ignored"* that she had been shot. This is predicated as an action that was *"upright"* and *"brave"* and one of *"being there for the children"*.

Mrs. F expresses her frustration at the way the inquest into the death of her husband was handled. She refers directly to people (*"the white policeman"*, *"Abdul Karriem"*) and gives a detailed account of her perception that *"the police were actually guilty, but they under the old regime were privileged"* and that the police were improperly assisted in the finding that there was insufficient proof of their guilt. She uses an intensifying strategy saying that what the inquest did not find, had in fact been clear for every one to see. In this case, the commissioner rephrases in significantly subdued and more formal, technical terms: *"you were distressed at the lack of any success of the outcome"*. This form of distancing is an alternative way of assisting the witness (and the audience) in coming to terms with a painful experience, in reshaping the memory by packaging the particulars into more generalised legal jargon.

Excerpt 6 records a teacher's account of how they used to run when they were teargassed during protests. The commissioner directly contradicts and

rephrases in opposite terms: *“I don’t think you were right when you said that you weren’t very brave”*.

The experience of a doctor who states he was the District Surgeon on duty, simply doing his job when called to see to patients injured in unrest-related action, is re-articulated by reference to many other occasions where doctors did not respond, or responded reluctantly when called to patients that were injured in the course of public protest that had turned violent. Again, his actions are predicated as *“health workers like yourself and others, ... placed their careers, ... career advancement and acknowledgement on the line”*. And the commissioner uses an intensifying strategy to support her re-construction: this doctor was not just doing his duty, he was doing his *“utmost to save the lives of people”*.

Finally, in the discourse between one of the perpetrators and a commissioner, we find an example of re-phrasing that has the opposite effect. Rather than reformulating the evidence of the witness in a way that will make his memory of the event more tolerable, he is coerced into acknowledging what he either could not or was reluctant to: Mr. V’s version of *“I was involved in previous incidents, yes, as I told you ... (in this case) circumstances were rather different ...”* is rephrased as *“So in other words you’ve never been involved in a similar case, incident? In other words you were inexperienced ... You totally had no experience of this kind of situation and you were inexperienced to handle it?”*. The re-phrasing was given with question-intonation, inviting an admission that he had erred because he had acted beyond that for which his training or experience had equipped him. The tone used here seems to doubt the sincerity of the witness and seeks more details than are offered in the witness’s statement.

## 6. Conclusion

The above analyses of the selected excerpts from the Trojan Horse TRC discourses are by no means exhaustive. They are given to illustrate how the framework provided by Discourse Sociolinguistics and the discourse-historical method in Critical Discourse Analysis can be used to improve our understanding of the ways in which language constructs and re-constructs experiences of deep conflict. The TRC set itself the monumental task of bringing a nation to both remembering and forgetting relatively recent traumatic experiences — remembering the courage and the sacrifice of those who suffered, forgetting pain that could become unbearable and ever more divisive. Language remains a central tool in shaping what will be remembered and how; it enables us to distinguish between forgetting and concealing or suppressing. Taking the research of TRC discourses further in engaged analysis should eventually assist in disclosing the full range of linguistic devices

used in mediating human rights abuses of excessive proportions. This will have scholarly as well as pragmatic value which makes it a worthwhile enterprise.

## Notes

1. Recent trends of decentralisation, of transferring governmental functions to other public institutions, has in some countries had the effect that governments and political leaders appear to be less powerful than before. Particularly, the development of globalisation has emphasised the power of big financial institutions and their ability to dominate governments and other societal structures in a significant way.
2. It has to be noted that 'ideology' is in some ways an embattled term as it has been used variously to refer to widely different concepts, ranging from "an empirical science of ideas" to "a set of dangerous delusions". Here it refers mostly to any subjective, fairly fixed political doctrine. For a brief history of the term, see Vincent 1995: 1–21.
3. The South African TRC report could be read alongside the Rettig Report on the Chilean process, or considered alongside the report that will give an account of the process in East Timor (started in 2002). This would require extensive new CDA research, but would certainly be rewarding.
4. Cf. Ruth Wodak's chapters in this book on discourses recorded at a photo exhibition of the *Wehrmacht* atrocities during World War II, where the process of reporting on injustices and memorialising those who suffered human rights abuses was addressed differently.
5. On 3 March 1986 seven youngsters were killed in a police ambush in Gugulethu. Besides particulars recorded in the TRC files, the testimonies of three of the mothers are reported in Krog 1998: 191–194; a documentary film that discloses even more than the TRC hearing illuminated, titled *The Gugulethu Seven*, has been produced by Lindy Wilson.
6. The killing of four Eastern Cape UDF leaders near Cradock on 27 June 1985 by members of the Security Forces was one of the first atrocities dealt with by the TRC when it started its hearings in 1996. Besides particulars recorded in the TRC files, there is a representation of the testimony of one of the wives, Nomonde Calata, in Krog 1998: 37–44.
7. The term 'closure' rather than 'healing' is used by various scholars, (cf. Boraïne 2000) and is perhaps more apposite as in many cases 'healing' is relative and difficult to measure.

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Website for transcripts of hearings:

[http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/trc\\_frameset.htm](http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/trc_frameset.htm)

## **Addendum A: Illustrative data**

(Drawn from the official transcripts of the Trojan Horse hearings, recorded on the TRC website under 'special hearings')

### **1. Generic Properties:**

Witnesses: journalists, victims, perpetrators, commissioners/TRC officials

#### *Excerpt 1*

The day of the Trojan Horse was the same kind of day as most others for us. We lived in this rather strange situation where ...

On that particular day we were responding to some — we all carried pagers and we were often paged and notified of incidents taking place at various parts of the Flats and other areas and on that particular day we responded to an incident in Grassy Park. We all hurtled down there, there was a number of journalists there and TV crews, including two crews from CBS, the network that I represented. ... We were at Grassy Park and there was the usual scene going on with kids and stones and caspirs and policemen firing rubber bullets, tear gas and I was in the vicinity of another journalist when I heard this pager go off saying that there was trouble in Thornton Road. ... we headed off to Athlone ... got out of our vehicles and set up the camera on a tripod. ...

We filmed a number of vehicles going passed us and it seemed there was a crowd of — oh, I don't really remember, the crowd is maybe 60 or 80 people of which a small sections were throwing stones at vehicles ... And then a few other vehicles went through and got the same sort of treatment and then this yellow truck approached from behind us, went passed, had these boxes on the back, it was a South African Railways truck and it had travelled down Thornton Road, away from us, towards Klipfontein Road. It went through the crowd and was unmolested, nobody threw a stone at it and I thought, I remember thinking that was rather remarkable because it was clearly a Railways truck and they — every other vehicle that had been apparently government owned, was stoned.

#### *Excerpt 2*

ZR: On the 15th October 1985, that day I will never forget. On that day there was a march happening and I could see that things would go wrong, and the caspirs and the police vans started driving up and down the roads. When the children were on their way to the Muslim school, I could see that something was going wrong. I invited them into the house and I closed the door of the house. One of the friends of my children did not want, wanted to go home, but I told him not to go home, that he had to stay with me for a while because of the obvious danger outside ...

Then this one fat policeman kicked open the door. My sister then said to him "Don't kick open the door there are children in the house." When he kicked the door of the house open, I was convinced that he would kill all of us, because he came into the house with his rifle. One child was under the dressing table and the policeman grabbed him and then I screamed at my sister

“Look they are taking Ismael.” Then we said to him the child is too small, leave the child. I then went to the kitchen and saw blood all over the kitchen. My food on my stove, and all of the cups and saucers and glasses in the kitchen were broken with the shots that were fired. I was then taken away.

Then when I returned home, my two girls were brought to me and the one boy had left and the other was still in the house. I was very ill after that.

*Excerpt 3*

ADV vZ: ... I don't know whether you wish him to read the statement ...

MS G-M: ... if you could read it please.

MR V: Could I continue Chairperson?

“I, Douw Vermeulen, hereby state under oath. I am an adult male and I am a security advisor and I live in Goodwood.

I was approached by the Investigative Unit of the Truth Commission and notified that I would have to appear before the Commission on ... to give evidence and to answer questions relating to the so-called Trojan Horse incident which took place on the 15th of October 1985 in Athlone, in which ... (names) ... died and others were injured. ...

On the 15th of October 1985 there was a lot of unrest in the Athlone area and the focal points of the unrest were in Thornton Roads and Belgravia Road. ... experience had taught us that there was not much use in us trying to apprehend the ringleaders, or try and arrest them by means of normal policing methods and normal police vehicles ... I was summoned ... Mr L, the commanding officer ... instructed me to go ... the persons under my command were, on instructions of L, given 9mm pistols and shotguns. ... At about 16h45 we entered the unrest area of Athlone in this truck ... From where I was concealed in the back of the truck I heard the windscreen breaking ...

From experience I knew that the normal *modus operandi* when a group attacked such a truck, was to first try and bring to a halt this vehicle, to then stone it, to then move closer and slash the tyres to prevent it from carrying on. Thereafter it would be set alight. I also realised that we were in danger ... There was no doubt in my mind that if we didn't immediately react to this attack we would probably not emerge from this attack alive. ...

After we commenced firing the attackers ceased their attack and I gave instructions to my members to stop firing. Members then jumped from the truck on my instruction and tried to arrest some of the attackers. Quite a few arrests were in fact made.

## 2. Re-construction of experience through rephrasing

*Excerpt 4*

MS W: Could we just go through some of the things you said. I thought in your, as you told the story now, that you were very clear and we heard very carefully what you were saying, but we need to just go through some of the things that you said. Let's look at the shooting itself because you were in a sense keeping those children safe. You opened the doors to allow those children to come into your house. Did the police persons actually enter the house and shoot inside your house of were they shooting from outside, inside? ...

You have told that you weren't able to help Mrs. Abrahams because you yourself were shot.

MRS R: That is why I could not help Mrs. Abrahams, she was screaming, but I could not help her although I did not say to her that I had been shot because I had to take care of everybody also my own children.

MS W: ... to ignore, almost, the fact that you had been shot, so that you could be upright and brave and there and there for those children that you had brought into your house.

*Excerpt 5*

MRS F: Yes, we were present at the inquest. At the inquest it was the white policeman who admitted to having fired, but they spoke about it in such a way and they helped him in such a way that in the end they said that they shot two people two persons had fired and then he said no, he didn't shoot at Abdul Kariem. No one else had been wounded that evening. ...

I would like very much for the TRC to go and look into this matter very thoroughly because at the inquest every one could see that the police were actually guilty, but they under the old regime were privileged, and I would appreciate if you could thoroughly investigate it and discover whether they were in fact guilty.

MS B: Mrs. F, I hear from what you say that you were distressed at the lack of any success of the outcome of the inquest as far as you were concerned.

*Excerpt 6*

MR S: It was often difficult because there would be a mass of police trucks or smoke, teargas. There was a lot of panic. We were not always brave persons, we had to run very fast on certain occasions ...

MS B: I'd like to say that I don't think you were right when you said that you weren't very brave, there were many very brave people at the time.

*Excerpt 7*

DR A: I am here as a GP because I was involved in this particular incident, but by no means the only GP who took part in the unrest and the treatment of unrest victims. ...

On that particular Tuesday I was summoned, I was called by Dr H who had a practice in Thornton Road ... I went home and collected my wife who is a nurse ...

I was on duty as a District Surgeon that particular day ... since I was the District Surgeon on duty, I was asked to accompany the patient ...

MS W: We've heard how District Surgeons and other people have in fact ignored very serious complaints and serious comments about the state of health of prisoners ... but I have to acknowledge today and have to mention that there were those health workers like yourself and others, who placed their careers, who placed career advancement and acknowledgement on the line and who actually did the kind of things that you described today ... who were able to do their utmost to save the lives of people in their care.

*Excerpt 8*

MR V: I was involved in previous incidents, yes, as I told you it is difficult to give you numbers. If I think of the Athlone area then I can recall an incident, if one can call it an incident because its circumstances were rather different ...

MS GM: So in other words you've never been involved in a similar case, incident? In other words you were inexperienced to be engaged in an operation such as the one that Mr L sent you to? You totally had no experience of this kind of situation and you were inexperienced to handle it?

# South African Novelists and the Grand Narrative of Apartheid

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The apartheid policies and practices by means of which South Africa was formerly governed also had an ideological or mythological dimension, which functioned as its justificatory narrative. The process of replacing that narrative which needs to be undertaken in South Africa can make use, among other processes, of the re-presentations of this society by our novelists. This chapter sketches something of the complex interplay between fiction, social reality, and moral-political understanding at the hand of six novels. It focuses on depictions of acts and experiences of **violation** as the signature of the ruthless force and after-effects of the apartheid system. It draws attention to the various, but socially meaningful workings of novelistic discourse in these texts, functioning as they do within a situation requiring profound psychic and social readjustment.

Apartheid as a compelling narrative of rigid racial and even 'moral' hierarchy is still insidiously *and* overtly present in most aspects of South African social and psychic life; a powerful, inescapable, inhibiting presence. The difficulty with pinpointing *a* beginning of 'apartheid' practices in South Africa is one way of recognising the complex multidimensionality of the system. At a time when there is in some quarters (predictably and particularly among whites, and especially amongst youngsters who feel that they 'had nothing to do with it') an insistence on referring to apartheid as something that is 'over', it is well to resist the dangerously glib, sentimental or cynical use of the term 'reconciliation', and to bear in mind the extent to which the overt political *power* practice of apartheid had the psychic corollary of invasive humiliation, and is bound to have a long after-life.

At a time when knowledge of history is globally somewhat unfashionable and locally unpopular, an engagement with literary evocations of a distinct period (such as the apartheid era in South Africa) can be very valuable. The evocative qualities of literary texts (such as the novels described here) arise in the imagination of the writer, but without imaginative/imagining reading of the text/s, the

evocations of the depicted situation and of its imaginary participants cannot be accessed. One might describe novels of the type discussed in this paper (for which the adjective ‘postcolonial’ — let alone ‘post-apartheid!’ — is *not* a good fit) as not merely mimetic, more-or-less ‘accurate’ descriptions/imitations of ‘real’ conditions, but as themselves moral or social enquiries, allowing the assessment of the depicted society by their readers. Perhaps this is what de Certeau has in mind when he declares that “Our stories order our world, providing the mimetic and mythical structures for experience” (de Certeau 1988: 87). Social scientists are at present moving towards greater recognition of the centrality of narrative in human endeavours. In his text *Cultures of Inquiry: From Epistemology to Discourse to Sociohistorical Research*, J.R. Hall notes that “both in daily life and in inquiry [i.e. research and study], a web of narration connects storytellers and audiences, giving substance to social meaning and historical experience as a constitutive practice of social life itself” (Hall 1999: 74). Chinua Achebe makes a similar point in his succinct expression “*stories create people create stories*” (Achebe 1989: 162 — italicised in the original). He does also warn, nevertheless, that there are “beneficent [as well as] maleficent fictions” (Achebe 1989: 143).

If novels are seen to function as enquiries, implicitly evaluating the societies or situations they depict by measuring the degree of social justice (as a health-giving or healing force) that they contain, the reader’s participatory role also comes into play in asking of the text whether or to what extent it allows the ‘subaltern’ to ‘speak’ (Spivak 1988), or the socially ‘voiceless’ to be heard. One asks, then (as reader), *whose* experience is being foregrounded in the text, and from which or whose perspective this is done. The novels featured in this essay — *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981); *And They Didn’t Die* (1999); *A Place Called Vatmaar* (2000); *The Slave Book* (1998); *Disgrace* (1999) and *Red Dust* (2000) — have been chosen for discussion because they are examples of the way fiction can (for readers) ‘extend’ the sense of apartheid as an *experience* or *praxis* (in depicting both its practitioners and those upon whose bodies and minds it is practised), making it possible — in different ways — for readers to recollect and re-imagine (or, as a character in the novel *Beloved* puts it, to ‘rememory’ [Morrison 1989: 36]) intimate as well as public aspects of the workings of this system. One could say that, without their being works of history in any simple sense, texts like these six novels keep apartheid ‘in living memory’. As an old man in Chinua Achebe’s novel *Anthills of the Savannah* declares: “only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior” (Achebe 1987: 124). Ben Okri, another African novelist, speaks of “the complex manipulations of memory that only fiction can provide” (quoted in Wilkinson 1990: 77). Writing within a focus on gender representation, Maria Pia Lara notes, in terms that are applicable to the present inquiry, that “the channels by which new forms

of solidarity are fuelled, rely on the capacity of narratives to disclose previously unseen marginalization, exclusion and prejudice” (Lara 1998: 8).

In addition to the novels referred to in this chapter, I make use of references to some non-fictional texts. I do so on the assumption that texts like those I cite can function (a) as reminders to those who would prefer to forget a shameful past; (b) as commemorators on behalf of those who might be unjustly forgotten; and (c) as challenges or correctives to official histories of all kinds.

Edward Said (1994: 216) has written that “resistance ... is an alternative way of conceiving human history” — a dictum one may invert to say that an alternative conception of history is itself an act of political and cultural resistance. The writing, let alone publication of alternative South African histories faced enormous difficulties in earlier years. Hence the importance of Solomon Plaatje’s 1916 text, *Native Life in South Africa*. In it, we find Plaatje’s ‘alternative’ description of the 1830s movement inland of Afrikaners or voortrekkers — a movement known as the Great Trek and customarily presented in a heroic light. Plaatje redefines this event as follows:

“The northward march of the voortrekkers was a gigantic plundering raid. ... Their governments were founded on the principle ... subversive of all Christian ethics, that the Coloured man was entitled to no recognition either in Church or State. ... he would be a bold man who would assert that the native races have progressed at all as a result of contact with the white man in the Free State.” (Plaatje 1982: 156)

Plaatje’s perception of the later, that is, 1913 Land Act, promulgated when white rule and its hold on the land had been hugely extended and consolidated, may be represented in the following bitter lamentation (contained in his text):

“For to crown all our calamities, South Africa has by law ceased to be the home of any of her native children, whose skins are dyed with a pigment that does not conform with the regulation hue.” (Plaatje 1982: 83)

Plaatje quotes General Louis Botha’s reply to a 1912 Labour Commissioner’s question (first cited below):

“But these natives lived there from time immemorial. It was theirs before we came here. How can we drive them off the land now, and take it for ourselves? [General Botha replied:] ... I think we are feeling very happy that we drove them from Johannesburg in the olden days. They lived in this country too just the same and the Kaffirs who became civilized under us have improved.” (Plaatje 1982: 243)

This quotation confirms Plaatje’s sense of the deep ruthlessness of both acts of displacement — the Great Trek and the Land Act. From a later stage of the evolution of apartheid I cite further illustrations of how a form of ‘narrative’ was used to

validate the system. Referring to ‘a change of tack’ in apartheid practices that occurred in the 1960s, Debra Posel writes of “the decision to transform the reserves into ‘self-governing homelands’”; those areas that earlier, during the 1950s, “had been treated essentially as reservoirs of African labour at the disposal of whites”. She writes that “the commitment to separate development was largely the ideological means to legitimise the denial of the franchise to Africans living in the country” in that it was “vaunted as a means of allocating Africans the *right to self-government* in *their own* homelands” (Posel 1997: 231, emphases added). Posel quotes the words of the minister and deputy minister at that time in charge of ‘Bantu Affairs’:

“whatever the world may say, the Bantu city dweller is someone who still yearns for his homeland, and that yearning must be stimulated.

The Bantu in the white urban areas cannot be dissected from their national relatives in the homelands, not even if they were born here in the white area. The Bantu in the white urban areas and those in the Bantu homelands are linked together into one nation by bonds of language — perhaps the most important ties — descent, kinship, tradition, tribal relations, customs, pride, material interests, and many other matters. The national consciousness of the Bantu is more deeply rooted than many people realise and are prepared to accept.” (Posel 1997: 233)

Posel also cites a circular from these ministers’ department:

“it is accepted Government policy that the Bantu are only temporarily resident in the European areas ... for as long as they offer their labour there. As soon as they become, for some reason or another, no longer fit to work or superfluous in the labour market, they are expected to return to their country of origin or the territory of the national unit where they fit in ethnically if they were not born and bred in the homeland.” (Posel 1997: 234)

Moving from the earlier stages to the formal ‘ending’ of apartheid, I draw attention to the stark contrasts between the above documents of state and the final clause of the 1993 Constitution, which reads:

“The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions and strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflict and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge.

These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* [the African philosophy of humanism] but not for victimisation.

In order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted ... [and so forth]” (quoted in Krog 1996: vi)

In Antjie Krog's text *Country of My Skull*, the aims of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are summarised as follows:

“to return to victims their civil and human rights; to restore the moral order of the society; to seek the truth, record it and make it known to the public; to create a culture of human rights and respect for the rule of law; and to prevent the shameful events of the past from ever occurring again.” (Krog 1996: vii)

Are these aims — in both the Constitution and the TRC — as absurdly, piously unrealistic as they are laudable? Do the six novels this paper refers to confirm the possibility of a movement from such a past towards such a present, or future? A related question is, do we in our anxiety to close the apartheid books not become far too hasty in imagining that such a transformation is underway? Fanon has written: “We will have to bind up for years to come the many, *sometimes ineffaceable* wounds that the colonialist onslaught has inflicted on our people”, and he warns that “imperialism ... leaves in its wake here and there *tinctures of decay*” (1967: 200, emphases added).

I read Fanon's words as a warning that the language of reconciliation, if used in a facile rather than circumspect manner, runs the danger of promoting a forgetfulness. It runs the danger of sidestepping, or of being *suspected* of avoiding, those awkward issues of *retributive* justice, restitution, and recovery. These are simultaneously urgent, difficult and agonisingly slow processes, or perhaps gaps and omissions in our social life. Perhaps most public utterance is inherently unreliable, except insofar as such utterances are ‘actions’, enactments of attitudes. Novels, as somehow both personal and ‘impersonal’ — in the sense of being socially embodied and publicly consumed (though ‘individually’ written, and depicting individual experience) — are perhaps more reliable indices of the psychic life of society.

Poet Ingrid de Kok notes that in present-day South Africa, “there is a strong impulse ... supported and sustained by the media, for a grand concluding narrative”; she suggests that “the ability of artistic transactions to perform an elegiac function is ... especially valuable at a time of rapid social change” (De Kok 2000: 61). She declares it ‘understandable’ that there is an attempt “to erase the fouler accretions of [the society's] past”, but believes that “for the project of reconciliation to succeed, individuals and the nation require the physical evidence of our suffering and complicity to be displayed” (De Kok 2000: 71). I would argue that this is even truer of ‘non-physical’ commemorations of apartheid, such as are found in novels like the ones discussed in this chapter.

My necessarily brief presentation of six novels ranges from Serote's, written when apartheid was at its fullest power, to texts published very recently and even themselves responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, by implication addressing some of the questions mentioned here. Apartheid told its own



tale of supposedly justly, racially determined destinies; it told of a South African, but European-based 'civilisation' (as exemplified in the 1912 Botha quote cited by Plaatje), tidying and regulating the social existence of those living here.

Sol Plaatje (quoted earlier) makes dispossession or land theft his text's central focus, and considers the way this *dis-honours* the indigenes. Antjie Krog's accounts of some TRC hearings record the multiple instances of invasion, not so much of land, but of rooms and houses, of bodies, and of minds. To link the six disparate main texts discussed here I focus on the depiction of forms of this gross invasiveness, for which I loosely employ the term *violation*. In this chapter, the term is conceived of as applying to acts of invasion akin to (or even actual) rape, the dishonouring of the victim.

My own choice for the South African novel that (to date) most adequately, in the most profoundly felt and psychically searching manner, depicts the experience of living under apartheid is Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981). Most readers would agree that two of the most harrowing scenes in this novel are the two scenes where (mostly) white police humiliate and torture a black victim. The scene of the arrest of and assault on the reporter Tsi Molope (79–90) — treatment which is meant to intimidate him after he stumbled upon a roadside police assault, perhaps murder, of an unknown black man — is both akin to *and* fundamentally different from the second scene, the dying moments of Tsi's much younger nephew, the captured political activist Oupa (307–313). In both these scenes, the focus is simultaneously on bodily excruciation — the loss of control over the most intimate physical functions — and on the captor's attempt to humiliate and cow the victim. This attempt is successful in the case of the older man, Tsi, who after this episode registers the feeling that "there was no way that I could call her name, and not lose, fall, lie down in shame" (88), and has to reach far back in memory to his grandmother's injunction: "Child, you must know ... that you have a journey to make" (88–89). By contrast, Oupa (who is only nineteen) in *his* dying moments at the hands of and in the midst of his torturers thinks only "I must stand up", and he manages to do this despite the broken state of his body, proclaiming: "Yes, I *am* a member of the Movement" (313) — his words a final affirmation of his refusal to betray his people and of his belief in the dignity and validity of the struggle.

The primary scene of violation in Lauretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die* (1990) occurs when the protagonist Jezile's servant's room is invaded at night by her employer, the husband in the lower-middle class white family for whom she works as a domestic servant. What is remarkable about Ngcobo's presentation of this devastating event is the low-key and non-sensational tone of her description. She even makes the white man's claim that he has long been in love with Jezile carry a vestige of conviction — despite the fact that this "love" causes "panic and horror" (204) in

Jezile and leaves her “winc[ing] and whimper[ing]” like a wounded animal, feeling “dirty and steeped in evil” by his “slimy emission” (205). When the child is born, obviously fathered by a white man, Jezile is unceremoniously and hastily sent back to her people — who then reject her on behalf of her at that time jailed husband, as if she were a guilty party! Her husband’s family eventually take both her daughters away from her, and she is left with the child who resulted from the rape, who soon gets the nickname Lungu (i.e. ‘white’). Yet, because Jezile refuses to resent the child who is the innocent result, *and* cause, of so much misfortune, Lungu grows up to become a lovable, courageous person who identifies fiercely with the black cause. Even after he is paralysed in a student demonstration, Lungu does not despair, but qualifies as a medical doctor to serve his oppressed compatriots. The rape to which Jezile was earlier subjected is the direct empowering agent that enables her (much later) to kill a patrolling white soldier who (years later, one dark night) attempts to rape one of her daughters. She knows that she will be jailed, perhaps sentenced to death for this, but her final words express a firm conviction: “I had to defend her. We have to defend ourselves” (245). She has become stronger, an agent rather than a victim, despite the tragic cost of her courageous deed.

The novel *A Place Called Vatmaar* (begun in English, completed and first published in Afrikaans in 1995; now available in an English translation), is by a so-called ‘Coloured’ writer, Andrew Scholtz. It is an account of a small rural settlement in the Kimberley region — in some ways representing an idealised South African community for the time, in that it exists, despite its comparative poverty, as a fully democratic *and* racially inclusive village. This village, Vatmaar, is established in the wake of the Anglo-Boer War, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the proximity of the ‘white’ town, and is to some extent dependent on that nearby town’s patronage.

The style of this text is anecdotal; it is something of a ‘folk’ narrative exhibiting a number of the village characters and their stories and cultures, each in turn. The cultures represented are mainly those of the Griqua, Tswana and Baster (mixed-race) people, who live with one white Englishman (a former British army officer), and a large number of those classified “coloured”; these villagers all have dealings with Afrikaners and some other whites living in the adjacent town.

Despite the generally benign tone and perspective of the text, it is noted that whites moving inland killed the Khoikhoi and other indigenes in order to get sole access to the watering places of these regions. Contrary to what the generally cheerful tone of the narrative suggests, instances of violation occur in the experiences of those who settle in Vatmaar. For instance, the Griqua woman Bet, as a young girl, barely escapes being raped by her favourite uncle, only to be sold into servitude (by her own mother!) to a passing white family because her accusation

against her uncle is disbelieved. In the Afrikaner family's employ, she is later severely whipped for refusing the violent, sexual advances of her "boss". This intensifies her determination to escape to freedom and dignity — which she finds in Vatmaar with her Tswana husband. But the most frightful violation plan in Scholtz's text is the attempt to force a young mixed-race (Baster) woman to undergo the abortion of her love-child, because the white woman for whom she works as a nursemaid unjustly suspects her of carrying *her* (white) husband's child. When the young woman escapes from the abortionist's house and returns to Vatmaar she is jailed for dereliction and, as a direct result of the fortnight's "hard labour" to which she is then sentenced, she dies in childbirth.

Rayda Jacobs's *The Slave Book* (1998) is a novel written in lively style, based on careful research concerning slavery practices in early colonial Cape Town. By focusing her account chiefly on the slaves' experiences and on the somewhat fanciful, glamorous figure of an ostensibly white, but half San man who works temporarily as a slave overseer, Jacobs *imagines* the fuller, slave-side history largely unavailable in the historical records. Her tale is set immediately prior to the emancipation of the slaves (1834) and foregrounds (as the beloved, later the wife-to-be of the aforementioned young man) a very spirited *and* beautiful young slave woman named Somiela. Although Somiela is half white (the product of the rape of her mother, a slave woman from Malabar, by a Dutch ship's captain), her name emphasises the strong (and, for a majority of slaves, sustaining) inspiration of the Muslim faith. Jacobs's account of the many vagaries of the relationship between Somiela and her supposedly white lover can certainly be described as a romance, although the text is by no means trivialised by this dimension, being a significant act of cultural reclamation. But the author's use of the romance mode perhaps ensures that Somiela, *unlike* so many other slave women, escapes the sexually predatory intentions of her owner, if not the vengeance of his wife. The white man sneaks home when his family have gone visiting and orders Somiela to wash him — "his eager little penis", we are told, "inches from her face" (178). Of course Jacobs here employs a recognisable demythologisation ploy, but Somiela's horror and fear are convincingly portrayed, as is her thwarted rage at her own victimisation by the white woman, who pours boiling water over her arm — blaming Somiela for the attempted rape. Fury at such injustice propels Somiela's stepfather (a fellow slave) into an unwise attack on the white woman. Consequently he has to flee the farm and 'disappear' by pretending suicide. It is almost by chance that Somiela's own child by her white lover escapes abortion — despite the pressures of her difficult social position.

Much has been said and written about J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999). In my brief representation of this text, I maintain my focus on the depiction of violation. The gang rape of Lucy, the white daughter of the central protagonist David Lurie,

by three black men, is carefully contextualised by Coetzee; it is in essence an act of dispossession sarcastically fulfilling Lurie's own defence of *his* earlier seduction of a very young and beautiful "Coloured" student of his as having been an exercise (in *his* case) of "the right of desire" (89). The difference is that in the case of the rape of Lucy, what is exercised is not a "[right] of desire" for *Lucy*, but of desire for ownership and control — perhaps to be considered *repossession* — of the *land* that Lucy owns. Coetzee presents the rape as a cunning strategy devised by Petrus (the black man who is Lucy's neighbour and part-time farm manager) to subjugate Lucy to himself — as her new overlord, who will "protect" her from further acts of depredation (by other black men) by means of the now pregnant Lucy's "*marriage*" to himself, Petrus. Lucy's acceptance of the terms of this contract, giving Petrus ownership of her land and possibly her body, as an appropriate response to the changed racial power relations in the country at this time, is one of the most controversial aspects of this text. It was addressed in a recent conference paper called "The Woman Pays. Whose Disgrace?" by Anne Collett.<sup>1</sup> For my own part, my sense of acute discomfort with what this deeply ambiguous text seems to depict is tied up with the inevitably empathetic — because *insider's* — view of the errant David Lurie, in contrast with the unremittingly *non-empathetic*, othering perspective on the malign? benign? ultimately (it seems) merely cunning Petrus, the black man depicted as *caring*, in the end, only for land and neither for people nor animals.

Gillian Slovo is the daughter of the assassinated anti-apartheid activist Ruth First and of Joe Slovo, another of the handful of white South African liberation heroes. Gill Slovo has lived all her adult life outside South Africa — chiefly in Britain, and has made a name for herself as the author of feminist detective novels and of a family memoir, *Every Secret Thing* (1997). *Red Dust* (2000) is a vividly convincing portrait of South African small-town life as a social and racial microcosm of the larger, politically determined dispensation. Slovo centres her narrative on a hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Amnesty Committee in this town — which brings about the return of a young and successful New York lawyer to her birthplace. Her brief is to assist a local black family to manoeuvre a white police officer (of the apartheid era) into revealing where the bones of their 'disappeared' activist son are buried. In contrast with the somewhat glib approach of the lawyer, the success of the undertaking requires another former inhabitant of the town, now an ANC member of Parliament (Alex Mpondo), to re-encounter his torturer (the man who — he thinks — forced him into betrayal of his friend, the 'missing' activist). Although the larger emotional and moral issues remain somewhat lightly sketched or underdeveloped, Slovo's text is a persuasive depiction of what Fanon calls in a passage I cited earlier the "ineffaceable wounds" inflicted by the torturer's

humiliation — or rather, degradation — of his victim. What the author does well, is to indicate that, despite the resurfacing of a formerly experienced horror when Alex Mpondo has to face the man who broke him, Mpondo *can* go away, and live healthily and sanely as a dignified participant in his society, conscious as he is of his own weakness and ‘ineffaceable’ vulnerability to his former torturer. “It was such a struggle to free myself from that man’s clutches”, says Alex near the end, resolving nevertheless: “I *won’t* be his victim *again*” (316, emphases added).

Bessie Head, one of the great visionaries of southern Africa (who died in 1986), predicted of South Africa’s future that “it is bound to be as bewildering, Southern Africa, as bewildering as its past” (Head 1991: 218). But she also wrote, elsewhere:

“It is impossible to know how the revolution will come one day in South Africa. But in a world where all ordinary people are insisting on their rights, it is inevitable. It is to be hoped that great leaders will arise there who *remember* the suffering of racial hatred and *out of it* formulate a *common language* of human love for all people.

Possibly, too, South Africa will one day become the home of the storyteller and dreamer, who did not hurt others but only introduced new dreams that filled the heart with wonder.” (Head 1973: 103, emphases added)

In the contrast between these two quotations, or between the conditions of bewilderment and of restorative language which Head describes, lie the poles of our future development as a South African people. For remembering is perhaps as dangerous or threatening an undertaking as it is a crucial one, and there are common memories as well as conflictual ones.<sup>2</sup> Our authors tend to focus on the *ordinary* acts of heroism, survival, and villainy, that evoke that texture of life that no history book can convey. Neither the victim’s, beneficiary’s nor perpetrator’s role is an heroic one, yet (as these authors show in their texts) we are all implicated in and contaminated by the apartheid narrative, and we can go forward *knowingly* only by establishing where we have been, and how we as South Africans arrived at where we seem to be now. Encounters with the ways in which our authors (as many as possible, and from different perspectives) depict and account for our peculiar South African condition(s) is an available resource for remembering the “suffering of racial hatred”, *and* for reformulating (out of it) a restorative discourse that is not merely facile or dishonest, but “a common language of human love for all people” (Head 1973: 103). Nevertheless, encounters with these texts are seldom a simple source of comfort, and if read complacently as depicting a safely defeated horror, they will have failed in their commemorative function. In simultaneously honouring past victims and warning us of our own ever-present inhumane tendencies, texts like these can put harrowing memories to healing use.

## Notes

1. Paper read at the July 2001 triennial conference of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) held in Canberra, Australia. Anne Collett is the editor of *Kunapipi*: a journal of postcolonial writing.
2. Compare my article "Memory, Power and Bessie Head: A Question of Power" (Gagiano 2001).

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# Linguistic Bearings and Testimonial Practices

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The chapter considers women's testimonies before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, tracing the complexities of speaking about suffering. A growing literature suggests that violence and horror corrupt language and interrupt its flow. Testimonial practices focused on violence's recall then occupy unstable grounds. Arguing that testimony is mediated by the subject positions from which women speak and that these are shaped by cultural convention, the chapter traces the effects of 'modes of discomfort', drawing attention to the faultlines between words and experience when violence is recalled.

"Words are symbols that, even at the edges, pull one toward culture's centre. Deeds, even when culturally centred — 'habitus' notwithstanding — threaten to push against culture's limits" (Daniel 1996: 199).

E. Valentine Daniel's argument about the relationship of words and deeds to culture provides a useful starting point for a consideration of women's testimonies about political violence in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> As words, testimony "pulls towards culture's centre". As practice, it threatens culture's limits, remaking the everyday by uncovering silenced domains of experience that underpin habitual ways of being. A growing literature (see particularly, Scarry 1985; Langer 1991, 1996) suggests that violence and horror corrupt language and interrupt its flow. Testimonial practices focused on violence's recall then occupy unstable grounds. The chapter traces these through a close focus on women's experiences of harm as reported before the Human Rights Violations Committee of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (henceforth the Commission) and in research encounters beyond its parameters. The chapter draws attention to the faultlines between words and experience in women's recall of violence through testimony.



*Memory and words*

“I, the survivor, I wrap you in words so that the future inherits you. I snatch you from the death of forgetfulness ...”

“I have translated you from the dead.”  
(Krog 1998: 27, 28)

Richard Werbner has characterised as ‘rights of recountability’ “the right, especially in the face of state violence and oppression, to make a citizen’s memory known and acknowledged in the public sphere” (Werbner 1998: 1). The work of the Human Rights Violations Committee was predicated on recountability: the Act of Parliament that brought the Commission into being obliged it to restore the dignity of victims by affording them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of violation. The Commission explicitly described its task in terms of the restoration of voice. ‘Testifying’ or ‘telling one’s story’ of past violence became synonymous with the restoration of dignity and thence with the constitution of the subject in the post-Apartheid era: the speaking self as the healed subject.

A growing literature argues that in the aftermath of pain or torture, public speaking of pain — testimony — can be therapeutic (see for example Herman 1992; Agger 1994; Felman and Laub 1992). These principles — that spoken pain enables ownership and reintegration for the individual and has a juridical role in society — lie at the basis of the projects generically described as ‘truth commissions’, and predicated on testimonial practices.

Between 1996 and 1997, the Commission invited approximately ten percent of those who made statements to give testimony in seventy-six public hearings lasting between two and five days each. These were widely broadcast both locally and internationally in print and electronic media. Hearings were emotional events. Testifiers described the full range of violations that the Commission’s operational definitions of “gross violations of human rights”<sup>2</sup> admitted, including terrible torture, injuries and death. They also described the everyday humiliations of Apartheid and a diversity of harms that the Commission did not consider gross violations of human rights. Some testifiers described violations inflicted on them and others described harms done to other people, usually close kin. While men testified for the most part about their own experiences of harm, women mainly testified about gross violations of human rights inflicted on others, usually their sons or husbands (See Ross 2001 and 2003; and Volume Four, Chapter Nine of the Commission’s Report 1998 for discussion of these trends).

Testifiers drew from diverse genres and used a variety of narrative techniques. Some women drew from oral tradition; others spoke in clipped speech. Some spoke using forms rounded with rhetoric and gesture, others in words bleached by pain.

Their words, spoken in mother tongues, were simultaneously translated into the two or three main languages spoken in the area where hearings were held. Testimonies pointed to both the interpolation of violence into the structure of and possibilities offered by the quotidian, and the enduring nature of harm at every level of society. There was a taken-for-granted character to many of the testimonies: they were given before audiences that were often familiar with the context described in testimonies, if not the instance being described. Coloured with local knowledge and idiom, testimonies were fixed to local and national events. They were often explicitly located within the domestic sphere. Some women were consummate tellers. They used rich metaphor, tone and gesture and drew on poetic language and performative convention to carry their meanings. Other women found it less easy to convey the complex stories they told: the setting was intimidating and the harm of which they spoke too great to bear easily in words.

Between 1996 and 2000, I conducted ethnographic research on the Commission's work (Ross 2003). In attending hearings and tracing patterns of testimony before and outside of the Commission, I was struck by the difficulties many women faced in finding a (linguistic) position from which to speak of the kinds of violence the Commission as an institution was able to 'hear' and to which it couldn't attend to. Some of those difficulties were a product of definitions of harm that focused on violations of the right to bodily integrity and did not take into account the wider forms of damage Apartheid caused. Strong social pressures, not to speak of embodied harm, are brought to bear on women, too. Cultural notions of propriety, motherhood, witnessing and mourning shaped the ways in which women could (not) speak, as did their own political trajectories and commitments. It is to some of these facets that I now turn, drawing from testimonies, documentary film and interviews to consider the ways in which socially and culturally defined subject positions may narrow the scope for speaking of painful memory. In the remainder of the chapter, I trace modes of discomfort in testimonial practices.

## I. Different Subject Positions

### *Speaking from uncomfortable spaces*

By 'socially and culturally defined subject positions' I mean to suggest that speaking of memories of violence is not a neutral act, and that utterances may be made from positions in which the speaker is situated within intersecting and conflicting conventions. Class and race are the most apparent of these, shaping the interaction between testifier and witnesses and the reception and interpretation of testimony. Other positions, perhaps less immediately apparent, also carry their own cultural

weight and meaning that renders complex the testimonial process,<sup>3</sup> especially where people testify in ways that lie outside of the usual conventions. Let me illustrate with an example: that of women who testified to the Commission about the deaths of their husbands, a subject position from which many women spoke. One such was Sepati Mlangeni, who, on 2nd May 1996, testified before the Commission about the death of her husband, Bheki Mlangeni, a well-known human rights lawyer and political activist killed in 1990 by a parcel bomb sent to him at their home. Weeping, she completed her testimony, “Today I am a widow. I’m an outcast in our society because I’m a widow. In our community and our society you are associated with all sorts of things when you are a widow”.

Her words begin to suggest the sense of unease that may result from speaking from a ‘difficult’ subject position: one in which convention cannot necessarily be relied upon to endorse current action. In much African convention, widows are anomalous. They embody dichotomies between female and male, sacred and profane, personal and political, and public and private (Ramphele 1996). Mamphele Ramphele writes of widows that

“A woman’s body, as the embodiment of the generative and reproductive power that knits generations together, holds the secret of her ability to concomitantly embody ritual danger and ritual power.” (Ramphele 1996: 115)

Occupying a social position that imputes them to be ritually polluted and potentially polluting, widows (unlike widowers) are, for the duration of mourning, liminal figures, dangerous. The position occupied by women whose deceased husbands had been well-known figures in anti-Apartheid resistance is still more complex. Describing such women as ‘political widows’, Ramphele demonstrates that they are simultaneously the reminder of loss and are also transformed in the public arena into ‘political capital’. The position of women who occupy the zones of political widowhood is precarious. Ramphele writes

“The political role of the political widow derives from her relationship with her husband; she is not seen as a woman but as someone standing in for a fallen man. She becomes the ultimate honorary man ... her agency is not completely eliminated, but constrained. To the extent that she can renegotiate the terms of her engagement, she is able to enlarge her socio-political space as a public figure. It is a tough balancing act, fraught with danger.” (Ramphele 1996:112)

In their testimonies, few women who spoke as ‘political widows’ directly imputed victimhood to self. Take, for example, the testimony offered by Nomonde Calata on 16th April 1996 at a Commission hearing in East London, where she described the death of her husband, Fort Calata in 1985. She began by describing her meeting with Calata in 1974 and their decision to marry after she became pregnant. She

told the Commission of her husband's family's political involvement: his grandfather had been the ANC General Secretary during the Treason Trial, and Fort was so-named by his grandmother in memory of his grandfather who, at the time, was serving a sentence for his political activities in Fort Prison. In response to questions posed by a Commissioner, Nomonde Calata described her husband's trajectory to political activism. He had been a student activist at the time of the 1976 student uprisings and was detained and interrogated in connection with his activities. On his release, he trained to be a teacher. In 1983, he returned from work excited about a newly arrived colleague, Matthew Goniwe, an outspoken opponent of the Apartheid State, a founder of the Cradock Resident's Association, and shortly thereafter, a leader in the United Democratic Front (UDF). The two men became close friends.

In November 1983, Nomonde Calata, who belonged to an organisation affiliated with the UDF, was arrested. She remembered "Things went on and I was arrested ... I was fetched from work. I was wearing a T shirt on which was printed 'Free Mandela.' I was arrested and charged,<sup>4</sup> just because of that T shirt". She was released and awaiting trial when Fort was arrested in terms of the Internal Security Act. She recalled

"On 31st March 1984, it was 10 o'clock in the evening, we were sleeping. We heard lots and lots of cars outside. I said to my husband, 'No, let's not wake [i.e. get] up. Let's wait and see what happens'. We heard knocks at windows at the front of the house, all over. Because I was always close to him, I tried to be very strong. We stood up and lit up the house. I said to them [the police], 'If you are not going to knock only at the door, I'm not going to open'. They knocked at the door. Mr. Venter stepped in."

He sought Fort Calata. Despite Nomonde's protestations, he and two policemen pushed Fort out of the house. Nomonde recalled "I requested they must please not push him or handcuff him because he's got a chest problem". They cuffed him and left. She did not know where they took him. The police promised to tell her but did not.

In April 1984, Nomonde's case was heard. She was found guilty and charged with a fine or three months in prison. She remembered "I paid R250 a month because I couldn't leave my children at home without their father". The day after her trial, she was dismissed from her job at the hospital, marking the first of a number of instances of harassment and intimidation that continued while her husband was in prison and after his release.

On the 27th June 1985, Fort told Nomonde that he, Matthew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhonto and Sicelo Mhlawuli were going to Port Elizabeth for a meeting. They did not return at 10pm as he had promised. In her testimony, Nomonde recalled

that she had felt uneasy and been unable to sleep for worry. Later the next day, Matthew's wife, Nyameka, visited. Her husband had not come home either. Slowly the four women realised that their husbands had disappeared. Fort and Matthew's mutilated bodies were found several days later. Nomonde was pregnant at the time; she gave birth to Thulani, their third child, nineteen days after the funeral.

As with many other women married to political activists, the harassment did not stop with her husband's death. Six days after his death, a State of Emergency was declared. Its draconian provisions extended the security forces' already great powers. The security police visited Nomonde at home and taunted her with her husband's death and the fact that the baby now had no father. They attempted to evict her from the house. She responded that she would not leave: "they could take a gun and shoot me, but I'm not getting out of the house". The harassment continued.

An inquest, held in 1989, found that the men had been killed but that there was insufficient evidence to make a finding about who had killed them. The inquest was reopened in 1994 when new evidence emerged. A finding was made: the Security Forces were responsible, but no person could be blamed for the deaths. The men's families sued the state and, at the time of the Commission hearing, a settlement was being agreed.

Notwithstanding her own experiences of harassment, intimidation, detention and trial, Nomonde Calata's testimony focused on her husband's death. Once she implied that she had been an ANC member at the time of the incidents she described: a policeman at the prison where her husband was incarcerated in 1984 asked her if she would vote for the Tricameral Parliament when he saw from her identity document that she was registered "Coloured". She told the Commission "Before I could answer, they said they knew that I could not even vote because they knew that I'm a member of the ANC. I never gave them an answer, I just kept quiet". She imputed her own political activities through the use of inclusive language — "we affiliated with the UDF" — and through her familiarity with state structures. Both her political activism and her suffering remain implicit throughout the testimony, a pattern that was widespread in the hearings (Ross 2001).

The hearing process located Nomonde Calata and the three women with whom she testified about the deaths of the 'Cradock Four' — Nyameka Goniwe, Sindiswa Mkhonto and Nombuyiselo Mhlawuli — as 'political widows' who bore the responsibility to witness their husbands' activities and deaths. It was not the only possible subject position from which to testify: to varying degrees the women had all been involved in political activities and each had experienced considerable harassment prior to and after their husbands' deaths. A documentary film, "We tell our stories the way we like: the wives of the Cradock Four", made by students

at the University of Cape Town (1999) attempted to position the women differently. Although the title locates the women in relation to their dead husbands — as widows — its focus was on the four women’s lives, political identities and their experiences as wives of activists, as testifiers and as “custodians of the memory of their husbands”. Early on in the documentary, the female narrator comments, “as they shared their stories with us, a powerful and important chapter of South African history — often untold, silenced in the shadows of male activism — emerged”. Later, she adds “During filming, it became apparent that ... they already have a voice”.

In the video, the women speak forcefully. They describe their meetings with the men they later married, the complexities wrought in their lives by the political activities of their husbands, and their own emergent political consciousness. They detail the loss that each man’s death has brought to them and their children, and their efforts at recuperation in the face of hardship. Sindiswa Mkhonto weeps as she tells the students interviewing her “My son asks, ‘Mama, if my father was still alive, we wouldn’t have suffered so much’. That is why I asked you not to ask me too many questions. This history hurts me.” Nomonde Calata answers a question about how she feels about being asked about her husband, “I feel terrible and miserable and angry, because I am trying to forget ... It hurts me to such an extent that sometimes I wonder, ‘why did I marry Fort?’ because now I’m in the light of everything [i.e. in the limelight]”. Nyameka Goniwe concurs “We’ve been so harassed by the media, so now we tend to be negative and protect ourselves.” She adds “Am I a custodian of my husband’s history? I think, yes, I am. I think people will always come to me for information.”

Nomonde Calata explicitly compared her subject position and her resultant voice in the making of the film with that involved in testifying before the Commission or appearing in court:

“We’ve been telling many different journalists ... You’ve come in a different way, you’re more interested in me, in asking about myself, my feelings. It seems as if I’m talking differently now because I’m talking about myself and with the others I was talking about my husband”.

Perhaps the strongest statement comes from Nombuyiselo Mhlawuli: “Many people have been writing stories about us, making films and documentaries. What about doing it for us; we do it ourselves and tell our stories the way we’d like it”.

## II. Choosing Positions

In attending to women's accounts of harm, I have realised that telling stories the way one would like is not simple. It may involve speaking from a particular position in a voice that does not necessarily do justice to the self. Sometimes testifiers had to remould or even break with cultural convention in order to express their suffering. Consider the testimony of an elderly woman, Nokiki Gwedla, who told the Commission in Cape Town, on the 24th April 1996, that she had been brought from her rural home eleven years previously by her son Zongesile Kopolo. He had dropped out of school in the Eastern Cape and had come to the city to seek work. Hearing that she was unwell, he had invited her to come and live in the city and promised to care for her. He built her a shack in Crossroads. Three weeks after she arrived in the city, police shot him during the political violence that wracked the area in the mid-1980s. He was badly injured. Mrs. Gwedla told the Commission that he still has difficulty in speaking, that his arm is lame and that "bullets" remain lodged in his skull. Their roles are now reversed: instead of being cared for in her old age, she looks after her disabled son, abandoned by her husband, afraid to sleep because her son roams the streets. She described her son, seated beside her:

"He has changed in every regard, even now he is too weak you would talk to him now and all of a sudden he will just get angry. Sometimes I can't even have a peaceful sleep because he doesn't come back at night.

The problem now is everybody who wants to bully anyone, they bully my son, even my husband left me because he couldn't — he couldn't stay with an abnormal child like this one. Everybody thinks that my son is abnormal ..."

In response to a question about her feelings posed by a Commissioner, she said bitterly,

"There are many things about my child that are affecting me. ... I told myself that I wished that he was dead, I would be happy if he was dead, but now I have to work and I have to take care of such an old man. But sometimes when I am alone it becomes too much for me."

Testifying from and about such a subject position may feel compromising in its deviation from customary scripts of motherhood and ageing. By tradition, Nokiki's son should care for her in her old age. Instead, living in an unconventional script in which she cares for her son rather than being cared for, scrutinised by neighbours who humiliate her, she reported feeling vulnerable. Her son was even more so: he refused to testify and sat silently at his mother's side as she wept.

### III. Memories that heal and those that inflict pain

#### *Wounding traces*

The memory of harm — what Richard Werbner (1998: 76) calls ‘the trace’ — may wound in its recall. This may be especially the case when women are asked to speak of the self as a site of violation and of imposed power. In the process of the Commission’s work, many women were reluctant to identify the self as harmed. They proffered diverse reasons: some stated that they did not testify because they neither desired acknowledgement nor felt a need for reparation. Others wished to testify but their experiences did not neatly fit the Commission’s definitions of gross violations of human rights that were narrowly defined and contested. Some said that the events of the past should remain in the past. Some women were loath to make statements that their children might one day read. It may be that the public expression of harm ran counter to local ideas about how pain should be expressed. In this respect, women who were mothers faced particular difficulties; motherhood is a status that traditionally carries great weight, and some women felt it damaging both to conceptions of womanhood and to their relationships with future generations to declare the harms they suffered.

This was particularly true of rape and sexual violation, which were represented in the hearings and in public discourse as defining features of *women’s* experiences of gross violations of human rights and as experiences about which women could and should testify, and about which they would testify under certain conditions. Concerned about the scantiness of accounts of women’s violation, particularly sexual violation, the Commission instituted a number of remedial or supplementary measures in the interests of garnering “the whole truth”. Statement-takers were trained to ask “probing questions” of deponents and the human rights violations protocol was modified to include a cautionary note reminding women deponents to “tell us what happened to you yourself if you were the victim of a gross human rights abuse” (Statement Concerning Gross Violations of Human Rights, Version 5, 1997: 3).

By the end of June 1996, the Commission had agreed to a third measure: the holding of Special Hearings on Women, which took place in Cape Town on 8th August 1996,<sup>5</sup> Durban on 24th October 1996 and Johannesburg on 29th July 1997. The hearings were predicated on the assumption that many women had suffered violations that fit within the Commission’s operational definitions but that the Commission did not offer a ‘safe space’ wherein they could testify. A submission on gender made to the Commission (Goldblatt and Meintjes 1996) had predicted that women would find testifying difficult. Arguing that insufficient attention had



been paid to women's experiences of sexual violation, its authors urged the Commission to create enabling testimonial spaces (1996: 63–4).

The Commission and members of civil society considered it incumbent upon women to describe in public the kinds of (sexual) harms to which they were subjected. The Women's Hearings were predicated on the assumptions that women required different forms of institutional space from which to testify, and that once those were in place, testimony would follow naturally. At issue was the gendered nature of space rather than the nature of testimony or testimonial practices. Researchers attributed women's 'silence' about sexual violation to a 'general stigma' that attaches to women in a society that regards rape as private (Goldblatt 1997: 10). Yet, the act of rape is not necessarily private, and indeed, in the context of political violence or detention, may be deliberately public. What is private is not the act, but the ways in which society acknowledges it as a form of violence. At the Women's Hearing in Cape Town, psychologists pointed out that it may be difficult for women to speak in public about sexual violation: "Often the taboos and codes of silence ... make it very difficult for women to come forward and say, 'This is what happened'" (Walaza and de la Rey, 8th August 1996). The risk does not have solely to do with propriety: Laura Hengehold (2000: 189) has warned that "a woman who recognised herself as raped risks conceiving of herself as a victim in ways that may frustrate attempts at recovery". Young women in particular were unlikely to testify about harms suffered. Many feared stigmatisation. The violence they suffered was seldom given focused attention, save for a series of testimonies offered by unnamed women in Durban who described how men from opposing sides of the political spectrum in KwaZulu and Natal abducted and raped them. Their testimonies illustrate the interweaving of public and private, personal and political. Anonymous, testifying from behind screens so that they could not be seen, their testimonial practices bear mute witness to the fragility of social acceptance of testimonies that go against the grain of established convention.

### *Memory, identity and witnessing's work*

The Commission's work instantiated new forms of remembrance whose rubric of harm focused on the individual and on the sayable. Patterns of testimonies given before the Commission, particularly the absence of women's statements about their own experiences of harm, demonstrate that remembering and recounting harm is neither a simple nor a neutral act. The locations from which women speak may be fraught, saturated with discomfiting conventions that mould patterns of speech. They may render women vulnerable. The language to express pain may be limited, lacking or fractured. The metanarrative of pain and suffering — 'violation'

— instituted in the Commission's work does not necessarily sit well with women's efforts to wrest social change from earlier conditions of possibility. The Commission's bureaucratic processes (Buur 1999), cultural ideals and linguistic convention shape the form and content of accounts given to and by the Commission and may work to fix identities in particular ways. The resultant subject positions such as 'victim' may be narrow and imbued with negative social and cultural values.

These findings suggest the need for a renewed attentiveness to witnessing in the face of pain and its wounding traces in memory. In this chapter, I have tried to suggest that narratives should not be taken at face value: the subject positions from which testifiers speak are shaped by conventions that anticipate certain linguistic bearings, and against which testifiers may work in various ways. Scholars need to take account of the effort required to break with these, or to remould the possibilities of speech so that language more closely approximates experience.

Veena Das (1996: 88) has reminded scholars that

"It is often considered the task of historiography to break the silences that announce the zones of taboo. There is even something heroic in the image of empowering women to speak and to give voice to the voiceless ... [But] even the idea that we should recover the narratives of violence becomes problematic when we realize that such narratives cannot be told unless we see the relation between pain and language that a culture has evolved."

Her argument indicates the subtleties and limitations of language in the face of pain — both experienced and remembered — and suggests alternative ways of addressing pain's intractability. Das seeks a means to consider 'the puzzle of pain' in ways that enable scholars "to think of pain as asking for acknowledgement and recognition". She suggests that this may free scholars "from thinking that statements about pain are in the nature of questions about certainty or doubt over our own pain or that of others". She adds that "denial of the other's pain is not about failings of the intellect but failings of the spirit" (1996: 88).

Spirited attention entails recognition of testimony's constraints, of the ways that words and convention work in constituting speaking or silence, and an awareness of the limits of scholarly claims. David Morris (1996: 42) reminds us that "perhaps the most important thing that literature has to tell us about suffering concerns the need for respect in the face of an experience that always holds back part of its truth, inaccessible and alien".

Witnessing is delicate, a deed that pushes against culture's limits. It calls for action — a 'not-turning away' from seeing and hearing. It demands attentiveness to the interplay between words, silence and absence and awareness of social and cultural conventions that intervene in and shape them.

## Notes

1. Some of the material in the chapter appears in my book, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (Ross 2003).
2. Gross violations were defined in the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 34 of 1995 as killing, torture, abduction or severe ill-treatment. Elsewhere (Ross 2005, 2003 and 2000) I have discussed the narrowness of these definitions and their limitations in an understanding of women's experiences of violence. See also Olkers 1996; Goldblatt 1999.
3. Linguistic practices are clearly age and gender marked in Southern Africa. For example, in both Nguni and Sotho groupings, women's speech, particularly that of newly-wed women, is (or ought to be) hedged with respect terms and phrasing (see Kunene 1958; Finlayson 1984; Dowling 1988). Known as *ukuhlonipha*, this form of speech is an ideal-type, linked with behavioural prohibitions. Although frequently reported as being in decline, it is nevertheless in use.
4. She was charged with displaying a banned article in public.
5. The date, a day before the National Women's Day celebrations, was deliberately selected. National Women's Day commemorates the women's anti-pass law protests of 1956, when approximately 20 000 women congregated at Union Buildings, the Parliamentary buildings in Pretoria, to protest against influx control and in particular, against being made to carry passes.

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# History in the making/The making of history

## The ‘German *Wehrmacht*’ in collective and individual memories in Austria\*

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This chapter considers narratives about traumatic pasts, using interviews with visitors of the two exhibitions about the war crimes of the German *Wehrmacht*, shown in Germany and Austria 1995 and 2002, as examples. Numerous justification and legitimization strategies are involved in public and private discourses. The study claims that official genres, such as school books or TV documentaries, still launch narratives which exculpate the German *Wehrmacht* as institution, although the evidence provided by historians and the exhibitions is overwhelming. The *topoi* used (such as ‘doing one’s duty’; ‘all wars are the same’; and so forth) are to be found in similar debates in other countries as well. Hence, this case study illustrates patterns of argumentation which occur much more generally than only in the specific national contexts studied in detail here.

### Introduction

#### *Outline of the chapter*

Every society has to deal with traumatic events in its past, be it wars, revolutions, torturing, mass killings, genocide, violence and rape, and so forth. Often enough, taboos surround such events in the public sphere, or official narratives are constructed which mitigate, relativize, deny or mystify the participation of certain groups in war crimes or other crimes. Such narratives are frequently reproduced through films, documentaries and schoolbooks. Moreover, they are also transmitted in the private spheres of families and across generations.

This chapter provides an overview of an interdisciplinary study on “the discursive construction of the past”. In this project, we investigated the history of the ‘German *Wehrmacht*’ and the debates about possible war crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht* as a case study for the general problem of how societies deal with

traumatic events in their past. We investigated several public spheres in Austria and Germany, as well as the dynamics of ideological and evaluative beliefs and their change. After discussing the theoretical framework, I will focus on some examples of interviews with visitors to an exhibition about the war crimes of the German *Wehrmacht* to be able to explore argumentative patterns of justification and legitimization.

Since the opening of this exhibition in 1995, which may be regarded as a powerful intervention in existing powerful and hegemonic national historical images and ‘myths’, there have been enormous, both polemical and scholarly debates about the ‘image of the *Wehrmacht*’. After an accusation of ‘forgery’ in the case of a small number of pictures in the exhibition, a moratorium was agreed upon at the end of 1999. The report of the investigating committee vindicated the exhibition and gave it full rehabilitation, but the initial exhibition vanished from the public scene. In the autumn of 2001, a second exhibition on the crimes of the *Wehrmacht* was opened, and this was also brought to Vienna in April 2002. Again tempers flared, but the previous narrative could no longer be defended: the results and the evidence concerning the participation of the *Wehrmacht* in war crimes can not longer be questioned today, except by those who, on the basis of national socialist ideologies or some individual repression, will not or cannot accept the officially proven facts. The trajectory of the exhibitions has thus become a perfect example of the many communicative, political and ideological processes surrounding the discursive construction of historical narratives, and of the conflicts between them, which reflect the way science, media, families and everyday politics cope with problematic pasts.

At the beginning of our study we formulated the following research questions:

- What official, national narratives concerning the war crimes were available in Germany and Austria before and after the exhibitions? And how did they change? We decided to investigate three data sets diachronically in order to be able to reconstruct the ideological changes in the politics of the past: school-books, debates in the Austrian parliament and cabinet, and print media such as documentary films on ‘Stalingrad’. By means of contrasting different publics (school, media and politics) it is possible to follow the recontextualization of *topoi* and arguments, as well as interpretations. The contradictions between individual publics and within a single institution also become visible. Of course, both in Germany and Austria we are not dealing with linear continuities and homogeneous groups or opinions.
- Debates always take place in public and private discursive spaces. The investigation of debates suggests that specific political interests and therefore specific ideologies might be latent and form subtexts. We therefore attempted to detect

the most important characteristics of the debates on the *Wehrmacht* in Germany and Austria.

- Recollection and social memory are determined both individually and collectively. Through an additional analysis of individual stories/narratives told by visitors to the exhibitions, field letters from the Eastern Front and the anonymous replies to a questionnaire by former members of the *Wehrmacht*, it was possible to reconstruct individual experiences, beliefs and observations which were condensed into collective narratives or shrouded in silence (Heer 2003; Benke and Wodak 2003a, b).
- Finally, we also pursued the question of how (popular) art addresses the topic of the *Wehrmacht*. For this we used the multimodal analysis of a German TV ‘Scene-of-the-Crime’ detective story which was situated at the *Wehrmacht* exhibition (Pollak and Wodak 2003).
- All of these questions served to focus on our **main research interest: how democratic and pluralist societies handle traumatic experiences**. Many options exist: silence, taboos, rewriting history, war tribunals, attempts at reconciliation and social debate. The choice of a particular option is certainly not random, but strongly and mainly **context-dependent**.

The complexity of this topic essentially requires an **inter-disciplinary approach**, at both theoretical and methodological levels. Accordingly, the **discourse-historical** approach was applied, which integrates political science, semiotics, cultural studies, discourse analysis and historical research.

In many countries, many continue to demand the ‘famous ruling-off’: why keep talking about history and stories that happened more than 50 years ago? This seems very strange, since history devotes itself — without getting into any disagreements — to facts, sources and interpretations that may be thousands of years old. The reluctance is certainly more related to other elements in contemporary history: maybe, because ‘uncomfortable’ questions would be asked; silence is broken; and there is often talk of ‘guilt, crimes, justification and reparations’, and here both the culprits and their victims are still alive (Thiesmeyer 2004). In this situation, science is also inevitably drawn into the field of gravity of ‘the *politics of the past*’; it adopts one position or another and thus participates actively in the discursive construction of hegemonic historical images. In my own view, social sciences serve the reflection of social processes, thus also of the above mentioned debates. The past repeatedly and necessarily also encroaches upon the present and the future: in other words, without the past we can neither understand nor plan the present and the future. Our own scholarly interest consists of questioning critically what has never or rarely been questioned, of understanding it and maybe also explaining it. ‘Critically’, however, does not necessarily mean seeing something



‘negatively’ (as is often understood in everyday language), but illuminating it in a differentiated way and from many perspectives, giving new answers and ultimately also asking new and different questions.

### *The Austrian Context*

Austrian soldiers were part of the German *Wehrmacht* because Austria was incorporated into the German Reich on March 12th, 1938 (see Binder 1966). The male population was forced to be part of the German army; there was almost no way to resist being recruited. There were also, of course, a large number of volunteers. The *Wehrmacht* enlisted 18 million people (including 0.5 million women and about 1.2 million Austrians) throughout WWII.

In this chapter, I am dealing with survivors of the Eastern Front, the ‘*Angriffskrieg*’ (War of Aggression) against the former Soviet Union, where millions of *Wehrmacht* soldiers were killed, and also millions of Russian soldiers, more than three million Russian prisoners of war (of a total of 5,7), and millions of civilians. This war was called the ‘*Vernichtungskrieg*’ (War of Annihilation). The famous order by the high-ranking army officer Reichenau (10.10.1941) asked for the “*erbarmungslose Ausrottung artfremder Heimtücke und Grausamkeit und damit die Sicherung des Lebens der deutschen Wehrmacht in Rußland. Nur so werden wir unserer geschichtlichen Aufgabe gerecht, das deutsche Volk von der asiatisch-jüdischen Gefahr ein für allemal zu befreien.*”<sup>1</sup> The exhibition “*Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*” was the first exhibition, opened in 1995, to show in public war crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht*, rather than by other official Nazi groups such as the SS and the SA.

The exhibition caused numerous scandals in many German and Austrian cities because it destroyed the post-war myth of the ‘*saubere Wehrmacht*’ (clean *Wehrmacht*) (Pollak 2002). The thousands of documents (films, photos and letters) showed that the institution of the *Wehrmacht* and many of its agents were an inherent part of the extermination machinery; for example, tens of thousands of Jews were deported or killed with the help of *Wehrmacht* soldiers. In Austria, in particular, the myth was also part of a larger narrative, which allowed Austria and Austrians to deny guilt and participation in any of the crimes under the NS-system. Referring to the Moscow Declaration of 1943 (Sieglar 1959), Austria claimed to be the ‘first victim of Nazi Germany’, and with regard to the *Wehrmacht*, Austria and Austrians stressed the fact that soldiers were forcibly enlisted in the *Wehrmacht* and thus only ‘fulfilled their duty’.

Not surprisingly then, former Austrian (or German) soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* visiting the exhibition claimed that they had been either forced to commit crimes or that they had not seen or known anything (see Wodak et al. 1994; Heer

1999; Manoschek 1993; Beckerman 1998; Naumann 1998). Thus, the problem: 'Who knew what, saw what, did what' became central in the debates. Numerous justification strategies, rationalizations, equating strategies and denials were the discursive consequence (see below).

In general, the moral problem of the guilt and responsibility of Austria, and the participation of its people in the National-Socialist state, has still not been adequately debated (see Jaspers 1946; Mitten 2000; Brainin, Ligeti, Teicher 1993), although a huge reflection process started with the so-called 'Waldheim Affair' in 1986 (see Wodak et al. 1990; Mitten 1992). These questions have become part of Austrian scholarly debates and also of political discussions (Botz and Sprengnagel 1994). The former UN General Secretary, Kurt Waldheim, had always defended himself by claiming that he had "only done his duty". The denial of responsibility for its part in the NS-crimes and the foregrounding of being the 'first victim' is still a characteristic of Austrian political culture, and the *topos* of 'just doing one's duty' remains omnipresent, in schoolbooks, speeches of presidents and in the media (see Gruber 1991; Reisigl 2004).

This chapter focuses on how individuals deal with questions of guilt and responsibility. In interviews and more specifically in three case studies, individuals of each of three generations of spectators are investigated: those who were actively involved in the *Wehrmacht*; the sons of the *Wehrmacht* generation; and finally the next generation, the grandchildren. What are the differences and continuities in the stories about the past told by different generations? (see Erdheim 1992) And how do the individuals position themselves when they are asked about these memories or their knowledge of the *Wehrmacht* crimes in the context of the exhibition (Benke and Wodak 2001, 2003a, b; Heer 2003; Heer et al. 2003)

### Theoretical considerations

Historical consciousness, according to Reinhard Kosselleck, arises in the polarity between 'experiential space' and 'horizon of expectation'. Experiential space is taken to mean the "entire heritage of the past" to which a person or a group has access, and horizon of expectation refers to the anticipation of a particular future that is full of wishes and fears, plans and visions (Kosselleck 1997). The polarity of the two modes of being develops and is realized in the living present of a particular culture. The present, in this, is the mediation of the most recent past and the immediate future. Culture in this context means "a historically handed down system of meanings, with the assistance of which human beings pass on, maintain and further develop their knowledge of life and their attitude to life". (Geertz 1987) Historical consciousness is thus generated in continuous movement

which, proceeding from the horizon of expectation, has an effect on the space of past experience and gains material from this encounter for the development of the meaning of the present as space for action.

Most importantly, we adopted the innovative model that was left incomplete by Maurice Halbwachs under the title *La mémoire collective*, which was published posthumously in 1950. The fact that one does not remember alone but also uses the memories of others, and that one grows up surrounded by phenomena and gestures, sentences and images, architecture and landscapes that are full of strange pasts that preceded the subject, enabled Halbwachs to claim the existence of a 'collective memory': "every individual memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory." (1967: 31) In this quasi-collection of traces, as in the periodic making present of the past stored in it, there occurs something similar to the way in which individual memory works. As Halbwachs observed: "in the moment when a group looks back on its past it probably feels that it has remained constant and becomes aware of the identity that it always preserved." (Halbwachs 1967: 74)

Many recent empirical investigations illustrate the functions and functioning of group memories of this nature. Angela Keppler, for example, has investigated communication within families: "For families, it emerges that the same thing holds true in a limited framework as is true for cultures in a much more comprehensive space: without their own practice of recollecting their own past families could not guarantee any reliable version of their present." (Keppler 1994, 2001)

In his research project on National Socialism and War in family conversations, Harald Welzer demonstrated how through 'cumulative heroization' of one's own family members, there arises a 'good history' that stabilizes a family, a narrative that claims to be an independent parallel cosmos alongside the publicly disseminated picture of National Socialism and the participation of the community in its crimes. (Welzer 2001: 72) Hannes Heer, using such varied material as letters to the organizers and entries in visitors' books in the exhibition 1995, was able to show how some groups of former soldiers either united fanatically in a community with their fallen comrades or else distinguished themselves as 'us decent ones' in contrast to the 'others' who were responsible for war crimes: the SS, the party bosses, the retrograde units, the partisans, the Anglo-American terror bombers and so forth. (Heer 1999: 185ff)

Life stories, as analyzed in the above mentioned projects, but also elsewhere (see Linde 1993), are usually told in such a way as to present the narrator as an integrated and socially valued individual, thus drawing on suitable experiences which fit this narrative ('positive self presentation'; see Wodak and van Dijk 2000, van Dijk 1984). The interviews in the exhibition are partial life stories in confrontation with the documented crimes posted on the walls of the exhibition rooms,

which suggest a narrative different from the one usually told about the past. People tell personal experiences, tend to highlight some events and forget or deny others, rationalize or even distort some memories as to adjust them to their moral values, draw on the experiences of family members, and integrate these into their own story, which presents their very personal reaction to this context. These stories are naturally very different from stories of either Holocaust survivors or perpetrators, recorded under different conditions (see Schiffrin 2000, Rosenthal 1997).

In our interviews, the confrontation with the 'other, factual' narrative does not take place in a sheltered space; it takes place in public or at least semi-public. Norms of the public discussion about the NS-past and the Shoah are present, and with that a discourse in which description, exposition and so on often cannot be easily detached from evaluation and personal appraisal (Neidhardt and Bischof, 2000; Ensink and Sauer 2003). Thus, the question of personal and collective guilt is a frequent explicit and implicit topic. This is all the more the case since the exhibition stresses that the '*Wehrmacht*' as an institutional body was co-responsible for the Holocaust, for the killing of millions of Russian POWs and Jews, and for other war crimes.

Drawing on Fairclough's theory of interdiscursivity and intertextuality (Fairclough 1995), I would like to refer to what we discern in public discourse as '**colonialization**'. We find that the 'victim-discourse' of the soldiers and civilians colonializes (and monopolizes) the whole (or a good part) of discourses of the past. Thus, a context-sensitive treatment of the past, with particular instances of suffering foregrounded in particular contexts, coupled with an overall sensitivity to the duality of perpetrators and their specific victims, is of utmost importance. In contrast, however, an almost uniform discourse, irrespective of context, appears, in which all participants are lumped together in one large 'victim category', and in which the *Wehrmacht*-soldier and Austrian/German civilian is THE prototypical victim (Mitten 2000). One story (or two) — the story of the suffering soldier and civilian — which in our ideal picture is a relatively marginal one — becomes THE story, which seems to form the hegemonic narrative of THE Austrian Nazi past. Other narratives are excluded, dismissed, denied or marginalized. A ranking takes place: a ranking of 'who is the 'better' victim? Who has suffered more?' without contextualizing the events and asking 'who was a victim, when, where and why?'

Colonialization thus happens in two ways: First, by telling a story in contexts in which another story ought to be told; secondly, in 'appropriating' these contexts to the story, i.e. by habitualization and also by slight changes in the 'set up' of the context, thereby creating a link between the 'new story' and the context, so that one automatically starts to expect the 'new story' in this context.

Linguistically, we can study this colonialization as a hybrid 'misfit' between discourses, discourse topics, *topoi* and their context and functions, and as an

‘invasion’ of concepts from one discursive sphere into another. We are thus confronted by interdiscursivity. On a theoretical level, it is to be expected that for the generation of soldiers — but even more for the other generations — ‘knowledge’, beliefs and opinions of the past would be fragmented. Two or more systems of belief and understanding are frequently co-present. On the one hand, the picture drawn from an individual’s perspective, with her/his personal (experienced or narrated) experiences and exculpations, and on the other hand the ‘official narrative’, which is taught in school, in scientific literature, which has found its way into public media and which offers an explanation beyond the individual’s grasp. Ideological dilemmas thus manifest themselves discursively in such texts (Billig et al. 1988).

The second central concept is that of ‘recontextualization’ (Iedema 1997, Muntigl et al. 2000): arguments, topics, narratives, events, appraisals, *topoi* etc. change when transmitted from generation to generation, from one genre to another, from one public space to a different sphere, and so on. Arguments are decontextualized and recontextualized, and thus gain new meanings. When analyzing our texts, recontextualization is one of the most important processes of text production, and we follow the life of *topoi* through different historical times, genres, contexts and audiences.

### Research questions

Given the general question of how the different generations (of men) dealt with the exhibition, and with the ‘other’ narrative, as well as with the projected notion of ‘guilt’, which is associated with this narrative, the following issues are of relevance:

1. The different generations have different access to the past. Knowledge and not-knowing are intimately associated to specific actions and guilt. The discourse of ‘knowing and not knowing’ is thus, among other things, also informative of the individual’s perception of what constitutes an action that one should feel guilty about (and what does not constitute such an action), i.e. it displays indirectly their present understanding of what constitutes a war crime and/or morally repulsive action. Thus, the questions of ‘how are knowledge/knowing and not-knowing expressed in these interviews?’ and ‘what is (said to be) known and what is not known?’ constitute the focus of this analysis.
2. The expression of guilt and responsibility are analyzed through patterns of argumentation when confronted with the war crimes. As suggested above, justification and legitimization play a major role in these arguments, and typical

*topoi* (like ‘doing one’s duty’) are often to be found. In the concrete analysis, the following questions are relevant:

- a. What are the macro- and micro *topoi* and strategies in the interviews?
- b. Which *topoi* are the same, which are different for the different generations? How are they recontextualized?

Finally, the following controversial issue should be pointed to: the interviewees are filmed and interviewed by Ruth Beckerman. Ruth Beckerman is an Austrian-Jewish film producer, second generation of Holocaust survivors. Her style of interviewing sometimes takes on accusatory tones, and, on the other hand, follows more distanced norms of interviewing. The answers and narratives are thus co-constructed in the interview and context-dependent on the questions and flow of arguments. The recontextualization of the interviews into her widely acknowledged film “*East of War*” unfortunately has to be neglected here due to space restrictions (Pollak and Wodak 2003).

### Context and Discourse Model

The general theoretical framework for this paper is the discourse-historical approach, which was developed to investigate historical, organizational and political topics and texts (see Wodak et al. 1990; Reisigl and Wodak 2001 for an extensive discussion). This approach attempts to integrate available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields in which discursive ‘events’ are embedded. Further, it analyzes the historical dimension of discursive actions by exploring the ways in which particular genres of discourse are subject to diachronic change (Kovács and Wodak 2003). In this process, the non-linguistic theoretical approaches are not only needed as ‘information’, but deemed necessary to do justice to the complex phenomena under discussion.

In methodological terms, a guiding principle of the discourse-historical method is the principle of triangulation. Depending on the respective objects of investigation, this approach attempts to transcend the purely linguistic dimension and to include more or less systematically the historical, political, sociological and/or psychological dimensions in the analysis, theory and interpretation of a specific discursive occasion. To grasp the interplay of the different theories/disciplines, Wodak (2000) developed a model of the context and how it could be conceived of from a methodological perspective.

This model of the context takes into account four levels; the first one is purely linguistic, based on the choice of a specific theory of grammar, while the other three levels are part of relevant social theories for understanding and explanation

of the objects under investigation. At each of these four levels analysts have to make choices about particular middle-range theories to analyze the phenomena located at the respective interpretative level:

1. The immediate, language or text internal co-text [e.g. linguistic theories on intensification, predication, semantic verb classifications etc.],
2. the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses (discourse representation and allusions or evocations); [e.g. speech act theory; argumentation theory],
3. the extra-linguistic social/sociological variables and institutional frames of a specific 'context of situation' (Middle Range Theories) [e.g. psychology of trauma], and
4. the broader socio-political and historical contexts which the discursive practices are embedded in and related to; that is to say, the fields of action and the history of the discursive event as well as the history to which the discursive topics are related (see also Cicourel 1992).

In brief, this model locates the different theories as they are applied in the analysis.

In accordance with the discourse model presented in Reisigl and Wodak (2001), the activity of taking part in an interview constitutes a social practice, within an affiliated 'genre' — the interview. This activity has a number of (linguistically relevant) properties: An interview is usually a two-party conversation, in which one person asks/is in control, the other answers/responds, both participants are co-present and frequently — in the context of the exhibition — strangers as well. These features determine the properties of the genre. The interesting sequences for the focus in this chapter concern 'memorizing the NS-past' or more specifically, 'memorizing the *Wehrmacht*' (in Austria).

This discourse is manifest in a number of different fields of action (e.g. public addresses on days of commemoration, private stories, literature, radio and TV documentaries and the like; see Martin and Wodak 2003). The interviews — videotaped in the exhibition — make explicit reference to other manifestations of this discourse: to the exhibition, books, war movies and plays, letters, private photos, conversations. Throughout the interviews, a number of topics were introduced by the interviewees. In the conclusions, I will come back to these topics and the associated discourses and discuss how the interviewees negotiated their past through their specific choice of narratives, arguments and discursive strategies.

## Methods of analysis, justification strategies and some illustrative examples

The linguistic analysis of the interviews was performed on four 'levels': (a) an analysis of the topics touched upon in the interviews, (b) an analysis of the linguistic expression of knowledge and knowing, (c) an analysis of the *topoi* used, and (d) an analysis of social actors, i.e. an analysis of who was said to do what (see van Leeuwen 1995).

In his widely acknowledged book, *Dead Zones* (1999), Hannes Heer provides a first typology of responses to the exhibition,<sup>2</sup> specifically to the claim that the *Wehrmacht* was systematically involved in war crimes. In this chapter, his typology is elaborated and combined with the strategies of justification and legitimization discourses explicated in previous studies on anti-Semitic discourses in Austria (see Wodak et al. 1990; Benke and Wodak 2003a, b; van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999). However, one major difference must be pointed to between the respective analyses: the letters analyzed by Heer were in some sense voluntary and uninterrupted monologues, whereas the interviews are comprised of dialogues with a sometimes rather aggressively interviewing film maker. The setting also differs from the above mentioned studies of anti-Semitic discourse in contemporary Austria (for instance the study of the anti-Semitic public discourse during the Waldheim Affair in 1986) in which people justify and legitimize themselves in public discourse without there being any overt accusation. In those cases, similar discursive strategies are to be found, yet the accusation seems to be internalized.

In the analysis presented below, focus on the notion of 'linguistic strategy'. For example, a justification of one's activities during war (e.g. 'doing one's duty') is a linguistic strategy that serves the purpose of upholding one's self-image and presenting oneself favorably to an audience. Strategies are in turn realized by particular linguistic means, for example, by giving one's own group a particular name (and another to the 'other' group), using comparative adjectives, and so on. A very important means are *topoi*, i.e. recurrent argumentation schemes, which are intended to make the audience draw a particular inference (often by using a fallacy, Kienpointner 1992, 1996).

Diagram 1 depicts the array of discursive strategies (Benke and Wodak 2003a: 124).

The main distinction that is drawn here is whether people orient themselves to the context, whether they acknowledge that they are in an exhibition about the war crimes of the German army, and whether they take a specific stance towards that fact (left side) — or not (right side):



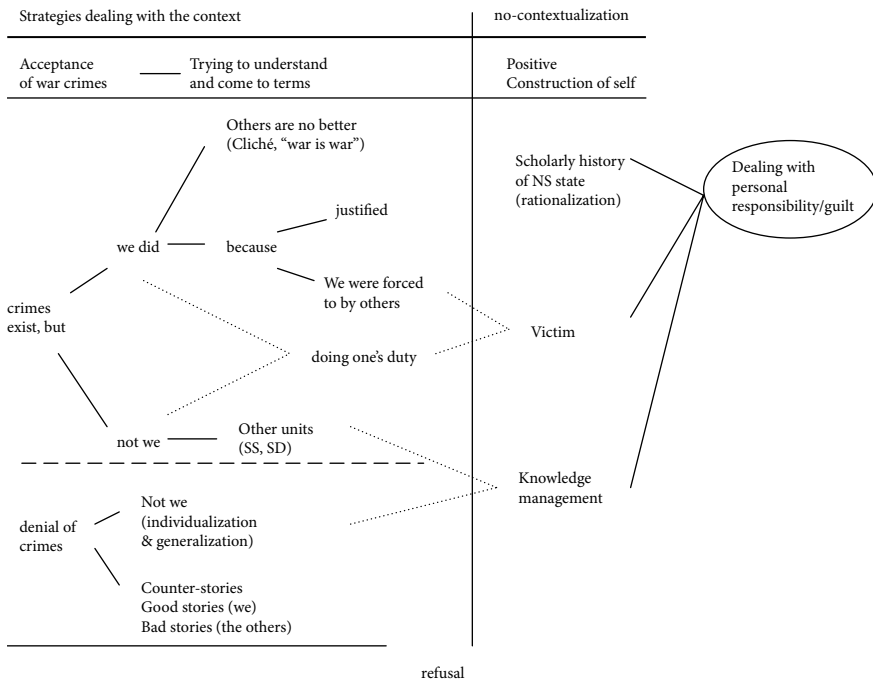


Diagram 1. Strategies of remembering

- A. The first three strategies negate the very context, at least at the explicit level; people do not position themselves with respect to their belief in the existence of war crimes:
  1. refusals to deal with the issue at all;
  2. Claiming ignorance. People using this strategy claim that they don't/didn't know anything about 'what happened';
  3. Claiming victim-hood for oneself; people following this strategy offer elaborate stories about terrible things during and after the war, thereby avoiding the issue of war crimes of the *Wehrmacht*.
- B. The next strategy lifts the discussion to a more general level. Using the strategy of scientific rationalization, some people launch extensive analyses of the NS-state, which are meant to explain how National-Socialism came to be successful in Austria, why people were in favor of the Nazis, and so forth.
- C. Through the strategy of 'positive self-presentation', the interviewee tells stories which portray her/him as having done 'good and valuable things.' War crimes are acknowledged, yet the actor claims to have had no part in them (or does not mention her or his relation to war crimes at all), but to have acted responsibly and to be morally faultless.

The following strategies acknowledge the claims of the exhibition at some levels:

D. Trying to understand.

E. For the most part, however, people do not confront the past, and use several strategies to justify or deny the war crimes:

1. Relativizing: People using this strategy will start to enumerate crimes of other nations, or use clichés that relativize the past, as in a generalisation like “every war is horrible”.
2. Two strategies seek to provide a (pseudo-) rational causal explanation for the war crimes. The first one simply provides an undisguised continuing use of NS-ideology, or NS-propaganda, which was introduced at the time to argue in favor of the war. “If we hadn’t fought them, ‘the Russian’ would be at the Atlantic today”. Similarly, the second one stems from the NS-period, but at least implicitly acknowledges that the moral status is questionable: “Others forced us.” (“If there hadn’t been partisans, we wouldn’t have fought a partisan-war”. “*Wenn es keine Partisanen gegeben hätte, hätt’s auch keinen Partisanenkrieg gegeben.*”)
3. The next strategy acknowledges that crimes indeed happened, and that the army may be held responsible, yet it attributes the responsibility to someone else, possibly within the army: “I only did my duty”. We locate this strategy between ‘we did’ and ‘not we’, as the interviewee does not take a stance on whether ‘the army’ was involved in crimes, or whether other groups are to be held responsible. As with positive self-construction, (some) victim-stories and knowledge management, the interviewee foregrounds her/himself as individual and backgrounds her/his association with the army.
4. Not ‘we’ but ‘them’. This strategy acknowledges the crimes, but attributes them to other units, the SS, the SD. The *Wehrmacht* itself was not involved, or only the one or other ‘misguided’ unit.

Strategy (5) is a denial that war crimes happened at all. In doing so, people often refocus on their particular unit in which something ‘like that’ (i.e. what is shown in the exhibition) was unthinkable.

These discursive strategies respond to the specific context. People might employ a number of strategies throughout an interview, but their discourse can usually be divided into parts each of which serves primarily one of these functions. Some strategies exclude each other in the interview of one person, e.g. people completely denying the war crimes would not try to relativize war crimes. This seems to be a logical consequence, but as Billig et al. (1988) have pointed out, logic or logical consistency is not necessarily prevalent in discourse.

In the following, I briefly present some examples of the above mentioned strategies (see Benke and Wodak 2003a for an extensive analysis of these sequences):

1. 'Claiming victim-hood':<sup>3</sup>

The first victim-story claims victim-status for a group of prisoners (that is the group of the speaker), and clearly names the perpetrators.

M: "Yes, I have been soldier from the 25th of August 39 until the summer of 46. Initially soldier. On the 9th of March '45 [I] was taken prisoner, near the *Niederrhein*, and then [I] spent a month with the Canadians. There, we were treated as humans, although they were all Jews. And then, we were sold to the French, and we were put in a punishment camp of the foreign legion. If one could not take off his wedding ring, this finger was cut off with scissors. And the young men, they were made bend over, and they were sexually abused by the Moroccans, one has seen that."

The victims are realized as the overall passive objects, albeit foregrounded in the subject position. The perpetrators (Jews, Canadian, Frenchmen, and Moroccans) are explicitly named but back-grounded. The strategy of victim-perpetrator reversal prevails.

This is different in the second victim-story, in which the narrator displays himself as the victim in the form of an 'I' narrative — although the story makes clear that he is also a member of a whole group of prisoners. In this story, in which the victim suffers malnutrition, there is not a single explicit perpetrator. The narrator foregrounds that he was a victim, and that the actual perpetrators are of no consequence for his story.

M: "I was in ....xxx it was, yeah, imprisoned I was by the French. I have xxxx the Swiss Red Cross, and xxx said to the people there: 'How are you?' 'Thanks you, very well', 'Thank you, very well' — then I raised my hand and I said: 'Please make a note of the address of my mother and my wife.' He says: 'Why?' I say: 'When you leave, and I am slain that one knows where I was slain.' He did so. Then I say: 'Please put everyone here on a scale, then you will know more, in here no one dares to say anything.' He went away and after an hour or two he came with a scale like the ones used by coal-sellers. I was the only one he put on the scale: I had 40 kg."

Overall, this victim story is at the same time a positive story of the 'self', in which the narrator presents himself as (uniquely) courageous in a difficult situation. This is not an incidental occurrence: Gabriele Rosenthal and others discuss the fact that Holocaust survivors sometimes use the strategy of focusing on stories of courageous resistance towards their oppressors when narrating their deeply humiliating

experiences in ghettos or concentration camps. It is generally too threatening to solely recount a deeply humiliating experience, to admit total helplessness and the loss of agency. Thus, one could speculate that such narratives generally present the victim as a person who still retained some control over the situation. In contrast, in stories in which the 'I' is included in a 'we', such additional face-preserving strategies are not necessary.

The third victim-account, finally, is an argument at a fairly abstract level, that none of the soldiers who were 'out there' started the war, but they were 'forced to be there' 'by historical events', i.e. through the course of history.

M: "We did not have any time for that. Look, I was in a fighting unit and there we did not have any time for that. But well, if a civilian was shooting us, then we killed him. Of course. That is an issue of self-defence. And now I will tell you. In the end, war is a struggle for survival for each of the involved units. None of these soldiers who are fighting there started the war. No one. But they were forced by the historical events to be there."

## 2. 'Knowledge maintenance':

Both, interviewees who 'saw' something and interviewees who claim not to have seen something or anything at all, extensively use mental processes of cognition (that is knowing, doubting and so on) and perception (seeing, hearing), with 'I' as the sensor to support their perspective. 'We' (did not know, could not know) appears only seldom, other agents are absent.

Interviewer: "As you can see here [in the exhibition] there are a lot of other things the *Wehrmacht* unfortunately had to do as well, otherwise the whole war of annihilation would not have been possible.

Interviewee: Well, I'm very doubtful, you know.

Interviewer: 17,000 Jewish Serbs, Jews were shot only in Serbia, killed in different ways.

Interviewee: I don't know about that. In Serbia, for instance I didn't see any. Moreover, one can these people/ you should not forget, that we were young men of 18, 19 or 20 years. Do you think that we saw a difference between a descendent of Turks, a Jew, or a Dalmatian? I think, in that melting pot you can't discriminate between people.

Interviewer: But in Pinsk that was obvious?

Interviewee: Yes, that was. First that was known, we were signalled that these were people. Especially one thing was telling: they all spoke German. And of course they were more intelligent than most of the others, who we found in other villages."

Especially the second move — “I don’t know because I didn’t see (myself)” locates the whole process of knowing in the past — one can only know what one saw; the interviewee rejects the whole exhibition as it does not provide first-hand experience.

### 3. Positive self-construction:

M: “I also had a second experience in this troop. At that point I was [military rank], and that very day I was on patrol duty and the officer gave me an order. The following thing happened: they had taken an escaped Russian POW, a young man of around 20, prisoner in the forest, he was still in uniform, and he gave me the order, I should go into the forest and finish the thing and return without the man. I then said to the officer: I am on patrol duty. According to the book I am not allowed to leave my position. He seemed angry and said: This is finished. I don’t know whether he gave an order to someone else, and what happened to the Russian POW, I don’t know. Nothing happened to me at all.”

In this account, the narrator sets himself off from “this troop” (as opposed to ‘my troop’, ‘we’, used at some point by most interviewees), “the officer”, “they” (‘the troop’) constructing himself as a singular hero, ‘I’, who is the recipient of orders. The soldier resisted (did not shoot the POW; i.e. “finish the thing”) and “nothing happened”.

## Three generations: A case study

### *The three men*

Three interviewees are chosen — one male interviewee of each generation — as examples for different strategic modes of discursive involvement in coping with the Nazi past.

The interviewee of the ‘*Wehrmacht*’ generation is a former *Wehrmacht* officer. In the course of the interview, it turns out that his whole family has a tradition over many generations of males becoming professional soldiers. He relates a number of stories and provides long arguments explaining why the *Wehrmacht* acted in one or another way. He completely identifies with the planning staff of the *Wehrmacht* (indicated through frequent use of ‘we’, what ‘we had to do’, while describing how different events ‘forced’ the *Wehrmacht* to attack Serbia.)

The second interview (M2), with a member of the ‘children’s generation’, is comparatively short, and we do not learn much about the person himself. The interview can be divided into two parts — a first part in which the interviewee

provides his evaluation of the exhibition, and the second part in which he tells a story about his father (what his father did — or rather — did not do). After that, he leaves.

The third interview with a student, and a member of the grandchildren's generation, starts with a lengthy evaluation of the exhibition, conducted with a number of arguments. It goes on with a reflection about the war crimes — what is it that shocks the most. After a short section of family history, a lengthy argument that disputes the crimes follows, i.e. did everybody know/carry out the criminal orders, are killings of partisans really a crime?

In analyzing the topics of each of the interviews, a classification of each utterance was proposed, determining whether it belonged to one of the following four dimensions:

- talking about the 'past', about what happened in the '*Wehrmacht*'
- negotiating the relation to the interviewer
- talking about the exhibition
- bringing in other (generally known) beliefs, assumptions, knowledge

If one investigates the three interviews along these lines, one finds a remarkable difference between the first and the other two generations. The officer himself addresses almost exclusively only two dimensions: he talks about his experiences, and he negotiates the relationship to the interviewer. All references to the exhibition are brought in by the interviewer, and are never taken up. This is all the more notable, as the other two generations, with no direct experience of the war, comment strongly and critically on the exhibition. In both other interviews, the exhibition is itself an important topic. While they problematize the exhibition, the officer seems to see the exhibition as a statement about 'his' past, and he is making a statement about (t)his past, to counter the former. In all of this, the exhibition can be seen as a mere vehicle to transmit some content. The question is not: is it right and good to present this to the public, but rather are the claims true or not?

The interview with the person of the second generation (henceforth M2) is quite different. In contrast to the officer, who talks a lot of 'the past', telling his version of the story, M2 evades going into '*medias res*', and opts for interpersonal statements as well as very general, positive and unproblematic remarks about the exhibition. This is also initially supported by the interviewer, who asks him what he thinks about the exhibition. When the interviewer subsequently presses him to talk about his family history, he provides a short story, interspersed with negations and 'belittlements'. After that he abruptly states that he would like to end the interview.

The overall strategy of this interview is a thorough personalization, in which the total subjectivity put forward backgrounds the issue of (moral) evaluation and personal stance. Instead, the issue at stake in this interview is what M2 knew (about the crimes) and did not know, and what he has learnt and seen now (in the exhibition).

The interview with the man of the third generation (henceforth M3) is yet again completely different. Even more than in the second interview, only short passages of one or two subsequent utterances occur referring to the past. The bulk of the discourse is comprised of statements about the exhibition, the personal interaction with the interviewer as well as of other contexts being brought in. The personal interaction with the interviewer is also different than in the other two interviews. Whereas tensions between the officer and the interviewer in the first interview were apparent, the desire to be liked and accepted by the interviewer in the second interview is obvious. The third interviewee seems to presuppose the mutual acceptance between the interviewer (who also expresses admiration of his knowledge) and himself. This can be noticed through the use of a number of solidarity strategies; i.e. he shows concern that people less educated about this past (than he and the interviewer) might be misled by the exhibition, and on another occasion he comments that a particular attitude would not be justified if one considered the Nazi-victims (Jews). In other words, in his interview he constructs an implicit 'we' by pointing to third parties that both of them would supposedly be concerned about.

### *Justifying, trivializing and relativizing the past*

#### 1. 'I never saw anything!'

This argumentative *topos* is the most important one (see above). The argument means that there might have been crimes but that the person himself was never present or involved when they happened. The interviewees were innocent because they had not even seen anything, not to mention any possible participation. The war, so former soldiers claim, was so exhausting and strenuous that they had to survive, and could never have involved themselves with deportations or extermination of Jews, Russian civilians or other groups of victims. They had only heard about all this after the war or through rumours; only other groups, like the SS or SA, had been perpetrators.

O: "I don't consider the *Wehrmacht* as criminals. They behaved like all other soldiers. Usually better than the others. As for the Jews ... if you ask me, I didn't see any. The only time when I saw Jews, it was a labour column, and they came from the concentration camp and unloaded wood at the station.

- I: Where was that?
- O: That was near Gomel (?) Gomel, Bobrisk, somewhere in the central section. So that was the only time. Yes, God, no, Pinsk (?) — that was almost a completely Jewish town. We went there because we were to break through the Priebitz(?). And there my people had...there were so many watchmakers working there. Some had their watches repaired. (Laughter) They were able to finish it more or less in a single night. And then we moved on the next day.
- I: So, the Jews were still there?
- O: Yes. They were there, when we arrived and while we were there and when we left there. But admittedly we were only in the place for about 12 hours.
- I: But you were an officer, didn't you also...you can read here how many orders there were. That the *Wehrmacht* should have transport available, that the *Wehrmacht* was given the job of taking part in the shooting of Jews.
- O: No.
- I: The Lassmann (?), Reichenau order behind you...
- O: Look, I mean, I didn't see any order from Reichenau. That is ....Besides that was not the business that we were concerned with. I mean, we were concerned with carrying out the deployment order, and we did carry it out. We were not interested in anything else, because we didn't have time for it. That's a task that..."

The interviewer states that the exhibition shows many crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht*. The immediate response by the officer is to reject this statement although he is standing in front of the photographs depicting war crimes. He uses a mental verb "(I) regard" which stresses his own point of view and continues stating that the *Wehrmacht* was not criminal. He thus rejects the main claim of the exhibition as such. He continues by comparing the *Wehrmacht* with other armies: the *Wehrmacht* was the same as all other armies, even better. He touches on the sensitive topic of 'Jews', and the *topos* 'I never saw any' follows immediately, embedded in two justification strategies: the army was not criminal; other armies are similar. Then he relates a short story, the only time he actually DID see Jews, which contradicts his previous general statement, but which — as individual positive stories always do — functions as an exception: Jews had brought wood, they came from a concentration camp and he even remembers the name of the village. He continues by depicting a peaceful picture of Jews who worked as watchmakers and who lived in another village.



The interviewer tries to confront him with the war crimes, asking him about the orders in the *Wehrmacht* to shoot or exterminate Jews. The officer repeats the *topos* of ‘not knowing’; he had never seen or heard of these commands and orders. Moreover, and that is the second important *topos*, the soldiers were much too involved in fighting, they had no time, they were not interested in anything else than survival. He concedes having seen Jews, but this unique story serves as positive self-presentation and as an exception. Otherwise, he had not seen any Jews (except for the second story, where he was not involved). The true soldier thus ‘performed his duty’, and his duty consisted of fighting.

2. ‘I am not guilty (do not feel guilty) because XXX was on the other side’

M2 (second generation)

I: May I ask you something?

M2: Yes.

I: What kind of impressions do you have?

M2: I certainly knew some of it, but I never knew everything. It is shattering, informative. More shattering I would say.

I: What did you find particularly ... impressive?

M2: I mean, I already heard about it before — this involvement, that the *Wehrmacht* was involved in it to a considerable extent, which I didn’t quite know to which extent, that was the essential thing there.

I mean, everything, one could say, one has already seen many things, but these connections are quite well documented, I think.

I: Did you hear from your — you were too young — did you hear from your uncles, your father...

M2: This is a bit difficult, perhaps I’m the wrong visitor here. I mean, well, I’m more affected on the other side.

I: In what sense affected?

M2: xxx. My father was not drafted, but he was in prison.

I: Why?

M2: Preparation for high treason.

I: What did he do?

M2: What great things could he have done? My God, he was with the “*Hahnen-schwänzler*” — nothing else [rightwing paramilitary group]. He wasn't a hero. Not that. But he's — he was lucky to come through.

I: And the whole time he was in prison?

M2: No, no. Then he was taken in — was supposed to be taken in, and then he went xxxx underground for the last 2 years.

I: How long was he in prison?

M2: 16 months or so.

I: OK

M2: I'd like to go now.

I: Thank you!

M2: Bye.

The son of a victim of the Nazi regime, a member of the Christian Socialist party, uses another justification strategy: the fact that his father was put into prison for two years under the Nazi regime serves as obvious legitimization (using the *topos of authority*); because of his father, he is not affiliated to the perpetrators, he belongs to the side who suffered. Although he avoids speaking explicitly about any victims of war crimes (see above), this reference to authority (his father) exculpates him (his family) once and for all from any responsibility. The interviewer tries to press him for some opinions, but apart from saying that he is “*betroffen*” (moved) and that all this is “*erschütternd*” (disturbing), he does not talk about details of the exhibition, but switches to his legitimization strategy. However, the story about his father is not a story about a hero. He obviously experiences ambivalence and remarks that one did not have to do much to be put into prison, as well as the fact that his father had not been a hero, which implies that he was not a member of the resistance. The man leaves the interview quite abruptly and rejects any further questions.

### 3. ‘And afterwards everything was — ‘*halt*’ (= simply) — a bit different’

The member of the young generation, a student, uses a meta-discourse, argumentations and *topoi* which are characteristic of academic discourse. Two strategies are involved: the relativization of the exhibition by claiming that it is one-sided, that there are mistakes and that it is biased by referring to selected authorities (scholars, books). And secondly, by using the particle ‘*halt*’ that evokes the image that the event being described was destined to come about this way by necessity

(see examples below). Nothing could have been done against it happening, the young student himself was spared this fate because he was born after the war. Both strategies can be seen as trivializing the claims of the exhibition.

I: “Did you discover anything new or did you know it all already?”

M2: No, that is to say..

Certainly I didn't particularly [get] the picture through this exhibition .... But through this discussion about the *Wehrmacht* I can say, I always had the picture of the untarnished *Wehrmacht*, and of course I've had to revise that, yeah, but I would have liked a little more objectivity, and particularly, this doesn't fit in at all, I think, this thing at the end about the Austrian daily newspapers, where simply this — the cultural discussion with Scholten [the then Austrian Minister of Education] and so on is brought into it, actually that's got nothing to do with it, I think. The issue is the crimes of the *Wehrmacht* — whether they happened or not — and what happened and so on and it's incredibly important, but to use this subject for the clear party-political preference of the director of the exhibition is simply — for the victims too — I think — out of order.”

In this sequence, he states that he would have wished for greater objectivity. And he then brings an example from the exhibition that has nothing to do with the photographs and videos, but with newspaper clippings about the debate in Austria on the exhibition. He thus rejects some of the claims through invoking other evidence that does not touch the point — an augmentative move of ‘shifting the evidence and blame’.

The next question by the interviewer “what impressed him most”, “what was new”, then triggers a longer response where the young man draws an analogy with young men of his age during the war and then uses the *topos* of ‘fate’; what is implied — if one continues the analogy — is that maybe he himself would have done similar things; had he lived during WWII.<sup>4</sup> The particle ‘*halt*’ indicates that in the end, this young generation might also have been a victim, a victim of this time and fate. His generation was lucky (“we are doing fine, but then, things were ‘*halt*’ a little bit different”). The interview continues and after a question about his grandfather, the young man replies with a long sequence:

I: “Where was he?”

M2: He was in France and in Russia too. But they've all got critical captions, the photos .. but it's very difficult, I think, because there are, there are so many sections and it doesn't — exactly, I wanted to say that too — that doesn't come out here at all. It was such a big machinerie, the *Wehrmacht*, with so many sections and armies and God knows what else, and it was not the case that every order was passed on. A commissar's order, for example, that has really

been proved historically that it was not passed on to every group — shall we say — by every officer. That happened too...and if you say they were all like that, that's always wrong, that can't be true. Of course, previously the only truth was the whole of the *Wehrmacht* is untarnished — that can't be true either — big, big sections of them were very involved in all the crimes, that's certainly true, yeah, but if just the opposite is claimed, you become unbelievable, I think."

Here, he rejects a generalization that was never suggested by the exhibition. Nowhere was it claimed that all soldiers had been criminal; what was claimed was that the institution of the *Wehrmacht* had been involved in war crimes. Thus, this young man employs the frequently used rhetorical strawman device, typical of justification discourse. He implies that the exhibition is seeking to state that all soldiers were perpetrators, and this would be "*unglaublich*" (not believable).

In all three interviews, multiple justification strategies are apparent. However, they are significantly different, and this is most certainly related to the specific experiences of the men interviewed, to their generation and to their own biography and family history. All of them employ avoidance and justification strategies of various kinds: in the first case, the concept of 'normal war' predominates and serves as an argument to trivialize any war crimes except for war crimes concerning the Jews. However, the interviewee emphasizes that he as individual was not involved in any activities against Jews. In the second case, the fact that the interviewee's father was in prison is argument enough to spare the interviewee any further questions or thoughts. In the third case, the academic genre is used to restrict war crimes to certain actions only and to shift the discussion to another level. The different quality of relativizing and trivializing strategies is also related to the differing personal involvement in the whole subject matter. The officer was personally present, the 'son' experienced his father's fate at first hand, and the young man has heard stories but is already far removed from the emotional upheavals of the other two persons.

## Conclusions

The interviews are all part of the larger discourse of coming to terms with Austria's NS-past. In the interviews, a number of topics, topoi and argumentative strategies which are typical in the debate about the past are apparent. The topics are partly the same, partly different for the interviewees:

Each interviewee starts by talking about his family. In the case of M2 this is initiated by the interviewer, but nevertheless M2 could have rejected or evaded the question. In two of the interviews (the officer and the young man), the crimes

against so-called partisans are treated as intrinsic phenomena of 'how normal wars are,' ignoring and denying the evidence brought forward in the exhibition, that the so-called 'partisans' were mostly not resistance fighters but civilians — including women, children and Jews. In both cases, Jews are clearly set off as either not being killed or humiliated by the *Wehrmacht*, or more implicitly as being a 'different issue' (contrasting them with the partisans), something which should not be brought up in this context (of the exhibition).

The one narrative, in which neither Jews nor partisans appear at all, is at the same time the only interview of the three in which interdiscursivity to the (so well documented) 'discourse of victim-hood' is manifested (see above). In this interview, the father, who was a party member of the fascist Austrian party, which governed Austria before the *Anschluss*, turns up as a victim — as he was put into prison by the Nazis after the *Anschluss*. In the end, then, none of the three interviewees told 'victim stories' (or mentioned victims), in which victims of the crimes of the *Wehrmacht* are clearly acknowledged as such. Jews are something 'separate' (and not to be talked about, silence prevails; Wodak 2004), partisans and their 'handling' the product of a 'normal war'. In what is told, families and family stories turn up as an implicit sub-text — obviously 50 years did not make this a remote past which is easy to cope with. Instead, this past is as close to home as can be. Not surprisingly then, justification and legitimization strategies are present in all texts.

Two particular strategies and *topoi* were most frequently employed in these interviews: problematizing 'knowledge' (one's own, or other people's knowledge), and disputing the concept of 'war crime' (i.e. killing of partisans is not a crime but a 'normal' part of war). Sometimes both strategies coincide, illustrating the difficulty of coming to terms with this past — for every generation — very clearly.

The exhibition not only confronted collective and individual memories with historical facts, but also — as was shown by press reports, the interviews of Ruth Beckerman, the TV thriller *Bildersturm* — it exposed this legitimizing and justificatory discourse in public (see Heer et al. 2003).<sup>5</sup> Since it did this not only with texts but also through images (the locations of crimes together with the criminals), it let loose a fear which possibly already implied its end. The public rejected the narrative suggested by the exhibition 1995; however, the new national narrative can never be the same as before. The presentation of the revised exhibition in Vienna in 2002 again started vigorous controversy and many debates (Uhl 2003). Thus, the topic — not surprisingly — remains explosive and open.

## Notes

\* This chapter is part of the finished and now published research project “History in the Making. Confrontation with a Taboo” of the Wittgenstein Research Center: Discourse, Politics, Identity, at the Austrian Academy of Science and the University of Vienna (principal investigators: Ruth Wodak and Walter Manoschek, see <http://www.univie.ac.at/discourse-politics-identity>). This research was made possible by the Wittgenstein Prize granted to Ruth Wodak 1996 by the “Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung” (FWF), which is hereby graciously acknowledged. This paper is an elaborated paper of a short presentation of Ruth Wodak and Gertraud Benke at the IPRA conference 2000, Budapest July 11th. (Benke and Wodak 2001, 2003a, b). Needless to say, this chapter would never have been possible without Gertraud Benke’s active and innovative participation in the project. The project has been published 2003 (Heer et al. 2003). I am very grateful to Christine Anthonissen for her comments, as well as to the Leverhulme Trust which awarded me a grant for a visiting professorship in the spring 2004 at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. This allowed me to complete this research, for which I alone am responsible.

1. He asked for the “merciless extermination of maliciousness and cruelty of beings who are not of the (German) people, thus [for] the preservation of the life of the German *Wehrmacht* in Russia. Only this way, we will stand up to our historical obligation, to free the German people of the Asian-Jewish threat for once and for all”.
2. Hannes Heer analyzed 150 interviews (about 40 hours of video) (see Heer 2003) and summarized the relevant results for the different age cohorts. Gertraud Benke and I focused on a small part of these, however, with an in-depth qualitative linguistic analysis (Benke and Wodak 2003a, b). Heer also included interviews with female visitors of the exhibition which are neglected in this paper.
3. In this analysis of strategies, I neglect the detailed sequential analysis of justification as well as manifestation of anti-Semitic beliefs due to space restrictions. I have to refer readers to the book publication (Heer et al. 2003) for this and other relevant rhetorical and argumentative aspects.
4. For example: “it is young soldiers, who are ‘halt’ committing the horrible crimes, right?”
5. It is important to emphasize at this point that images of war crimes have a very specific impact on viewers and readers. Numbers and narratives never achieve this impact because the reality never matches possible fantasies. Moreover, denial is impossible. Pictures become ‘facts’. Thus, debates on the ‘real’ pictures or ‘faked’ pictures tend to be highly emotional. The recent debates about war crimes in the Iraq war (May 2004) validate this point. The patterns of argumentation/legitimization and justification match the discursive patterns described in this chapter, although, of course, the context is different in so many ways. Our general point, however, is well illustrated: societies have tremendous difficulties in dealing with traumatic pasts which do not match their overall official democratic values and their national myths and narratives.

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