

A participatory approach to healing and transformation in South Africa

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Abstract:

In this article I describe my personal journey from working as private practitioner to participating in the wider South African society. Post-apartheid South African society struggles with overwhelming problems related to poverty, illness, violence, sexism, and racism. Moreover, in those communities where the trauma is most severe, professional resources are scarce. I propose a participatory approach which invites therapists to respond to these socio-economic and political challenges and the problems that arise from them, by thinking and acting outside the constraints of their consultation rooms and of traditional therapeutic conversations, into active participation in ways that might support healing and social transformation. I use two examples to illustrate and discuss the participatory approach with which I have engaged for over ten years. The illustrative examples show how a participatory approach can create ripples that impact communities in healing and transformative ways.

Keywords: Community participation; participatory approach; healing; transformation.

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I am a white Afrikaner woman who has been practicing as a psychologist in South Africa for almost thirty years. I grew up on a farm in a privileged family where my contact with black* people was limited to farm and domestic workers. I never questioned why only white people attended our school and university or visited the beaches that we went to. I accepted it as a given – some have and others don't, white people belong here, black people belong there. In the late eighties I started a private practice with rooms at a new private hospital in Somerset West outside Cape Town. Within four years the practice provided work for three fulltime psychologists. Success meant having a diary filled with paying clients.

When the political changes started happening following the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990, I was suddenly living in a new reality. By befriending black colleagues and listening to the stories told to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission I became aware of the suffering of millions of black South Africans. I had to face my own complicity with, and benefit from, the system of apartheid that had violently oppressed black people. I realized the extent to which the Afrikaner people and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), of which I am a member, were responsible for justifying this evil system. I experienced despair at the lies that I had been fed all my life and at the way in which I had swallowed them, because it suited me to do so. Suddenly I started questioning my practice that was serving only 10% of the community (mainly white) while the remaining 90% (predominantly black) could not afford my services but were clearly suffering extreme trauma (Kaminer & Eagle, 2010). When I volunteered one day per week in my practice to people from impoverished communities I was confronted by both the limitations of my training (traditional Western models) and by the privileged and sheltered life that I had been living. I had no way of making sense of the problems related to living in communities of extreme poverty: I had nothing to offer.

Overwhelmed by intense guilt, helplessness and burn-out I was diagnosed with a major depressive episode in 1997. I eventually decided to leave my practice and used the next two years to recover, retrain and reposition myself as a therapist within the wider South African context. I attended workshops in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand presented by Michael White, David Epston and other narrative therapy practitioners. They introduced me to poststructuralist and social constructionist ideas embedded in a postmodernist worldview in

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which there are no essential truths and in which the therapist is no longer the expert who knows how clients should solve their problems. I shifted from those psychology models that view the “self” as consisting of innate personality characteristics, which often isolate individuals from their social contexts, to viewing the self as constructed in social interaction. Embracing this position was challenging as Madsen (2007) explains: “The claims of social constructionism violate fundamental cultural assumptions that permeate much of Western civilization.” Declining to return to my lucrative practice with its good infrastructure and high visibility in middle-class society was a radical step at a time when white colleagues and friends were experiencing career uncertainty resulting from the restructuring of our new democracy. I was determined to work differently, despite serious doubts, pressure from colleagues and at times a tremendous sense of isolation and loss. The practice which I opened at my house in 1999 enables me to keep overheads low and to make two days per week available for work (mostly voluntary) outside my practice.

Post-apartheid South Africa has not become an integrated society overnight. Racism and other prejudices live on in many people's attitudes and actions. Ramphela (2008) points out that becoming the non-racial, non-sexist, egalitarian society envisioned in our constitution is a complex and time-consuming journey. Past wounds are deep and are still raw. Under the Apartheid regime (1948 – 1994) various laws severely impacted the family life of black South Africans. Families were separated by its system of forced removals, “Bantu Homelands”, migrant labor, and pass laws which controlled the influx of blacks to the cities (Sparks 2003). In the “new” South Africa, urbanization is taking place at an unprecedented rate putting increased pressure on employment, education, health, housing, and transportation (Amoateng, Rochter, Makiwane, & Rama, 2004).

South Africa, rated as the most unequal society in the world (Lefko-Everett, 2010), is a country of stark contrasts where one sees destitution, hunger and over-crowding within minutes of being in extreme affluence. Ten percent of the total population continues to receive 50% percent of household income (Statistics South Africa, 2008). With a growing black middle class the rich are no longer all white, but almost all white people are still rich. Despite economic growth the poverty has remained stagnant, inequality has deepened and the benefits of growth

have not reached the poorest of the poor. An estimated 50% of South Africans live in poverty (Amoateng et al., 2004). The majority of families living in poverty are black and unemployment rates are the highest amongst black people (Amoateng et al., 2004).

Vetten (2000) suggests that urbanization and modernization have undermined traditional black family structures and that this, together with apartheid's legacy of a culture of violence, has contributed to an increase of violence against women and children. Patriarchal ideology dominates in all South Africa's various cultural and ethnic groups (Ramphela, 2008; Vetten, 2000). Women are still treated as second class citizens who belong in the private sphere where they are expected to be subservient to men. Despite progress since 1994, the domination of men in the socio-economic and public spheres continues in the post-apartheid era, perpetuating the image of women as inferior and dependent on men (Ramphela 2008). Sexism is expressed in its extreme form in violence against women. South Africa has one of the highest rates of reported rape in the world (Jewkes, Abrahams, Mathews, Seedat, Van Niekerk, Suffla, Ratele, 2009a). Police statistics for 2010 indicate 68 332 reported sexual offences: 138.5 per 100 000 of the population (SAPS, 2010). In a survey by the Medical Research Council (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell, Dunkle, 2009b), 27.6% of the men interviewed said that they had raped a woman or girl. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is wreaking havoc in families in South Africa. An estimated 5.5 million people are infected out of a total population of just over 47 million (Ramphela, 2008). There is a strong interrelatedness among between race, poverty and gender. The vast majority dying of AIDS are black people in their prime. They leave behind more than a million orphans who are taken care of by aging grandparents, live in child-headed households or are on the streets. There is a strong link between vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and poverty (Nattrass, 2004). Ideas of masculinity based on gender hierarchy and the sexual entitlement of men add to the vulnerability of women who make up 58% of the adult population who are HIV positive in South Africa (Ramphela 2008).

Becoming aware of the realities of South African society was the first step in my commitment to participate in redressing some of the injustices of the past and working towards greater equality, justice and healing for all our people. Finding a point of entry to serve this society beyond my middle-class practice posed a further challenge. I was well aware of the

discrepancies between services available to township schools and those in middleclass suburbs. The apartheid government used separate and inferior education for blacks to ensure a cheap black labor force with no rights and to achieve the goals of segregation in South African society (Bloch, 2009). In the new democracy formerly white schools, with their superior facilities and infrastructures inherited from the apartheid years, are able to raise funds from their middleclass parents' base as extra contributions to education quality. Vast inequalities are produced and reproduced in schools with formerly white schools producing uniformly better results while rural and township schools survive with great difficulty (Bloch 2009).

I approached the school psychologist in our area, Ms. Hamley-Wise**, to volunteer my services one day a week to a township school. She confirmed the disproportionate psychologist-client ratio in the privileged community where parents could pay for private psychologists versus the disadvantaged community where the government employed one psychologist for thirteen thousand learners. She was grateful for my offer and had no difficulty in arranging this with the education authorities.

Illustrative example 1: Participation with the Muslim community

Ms. Hamley-Wise took me to the Strand Muslim Primary School in a colored township five kilometers from where I live. At this school, with a Mosque on its doorstep, Muslim teachers are committed to education based on Islamic philosophy. Mr. Fanie, the principal, needed help with six eleven year old boys who had been stealing together for years. The poverty, extreme hardship and complex social problems endured by most of these boys and their families shocked me, and left me feeling overwhelmed and inadequate. Fortunately, David Epston was conducting a workshop in Cape Town at that time. He agreed to a consultation about his approach to stealing (Seymour & Epston 1992). Epston (1999) proposed that a community of concern from each boy's life gather for Honesty Meetings to prepare for Honesty Tests. Through Honesty Testing a situation is organized in which the boys believe that they are being watched all the time. During the Honesty Meeting people from the boy's life are interviewed about the effects of his stealing behavior and what it would mean if the boy redeemed his reputation. The community of concern also provides opportunities for restorative justice by asking the victims what the boy could do to make up for what he had stolen. Once the boy gives consent to be tested, the community of concern receive instructions regarding the Honesty Testing. I followed

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Epston's guidelines in a process documented elsewhere (Morkel 2000; Morkel 2002). I was surprised by the community's response and delighted that five of the boys were able to receive Honesty Certificates within the next six months.

Mr. Fanie's participation as principal and cultural consultant (Waldegrave, 2003) to my work as white psychologist was invaluable. In a letter to apply for funds for Mr. Fanie's attendance at a conference where I was presenting a paper on my participation with the school I wrote:

I'm moved by the way my own life has been enriched through my involvement with this school. I worked very closely with Mr. Fanie, the principal, and was touched by his sincere caring for each of the boys. He knew them and their families well through taking the time to talk to them, sometimes getting into his car to fetch them or to speak to them at their homes....The spirit of community and caring in that school where many children come from homes where poverty, crime, violence, abuse and death is part of everyday life, is remarkable. The staff members I met and worked with demonstrated the same concern and love for the children.

I shared these words with the audience at the conference - a moment filled with emotion as a white woman acknowledged the transformative effect of connections across racial, religious and cultural barriers.

Mr. Fanie seemed to value my keen interest and always made time to talk to me about Islam and the Strand Muslim community's history of poverty, oppression and hardship. Their forefathers were brought as slaves from Indonesia to the Cape in the late 17th century. In an aggressively "Christian" apartheid state, Islam was regarded as the enemy and Muslim communities victimized (The RICS Report, 1999). Mr. Fanie described the "worst day of my life" when, in the mid 1960's and in accordance with the infamous Group Areas Act, their community was forced to move from their homes near the beach where they lived as fishing community. Mr. Fanie and I are of similar age. I spent my childhood just thirty kilometers away on the other side of the mountain, completely unaware of the trauma which these forced removals caused this community.

Mr. Fanie introduced me to Mr. Rhoda, a retired principal of the Muslim school, who was documenting his community's history through oral and photographic evidence. Although apartheid histories omit the Strand Muslim community's rich legacy, Mr. Rhoda's research revealed that their ancestors were the first inhabitants of the Strand area. I was touched and honored when my husband, Jaco, and I were invited to the launch of Mr. Rhoda's historic photo exhibition during the Strand Muslim community's 2003 Heritage Day celebrations. In my letter thanking the organizing committee, I reflected on the interrelatedness of my personal life with the Strand community and acknowledged the injustices that the community suffered, as well as my own complicity:

As a child growing up in Grabouw, the Hottentots-Holland Mountains were also my beloved landmark and the Strand an extension of my known world. I have numerous childhood memories of buying fish at the jetty, watching movies at the Rialto and shopping at Friedman and Cohen and at the Co-op. I am embarrassed and heart sore that I was part of the group who, as carefree children, swam at the Strand totally oblivious of the injustices that my people were practicing towards your community in the Strand.

I commended Mr. Rhoda for his research and the community for what it reflected about their spirit of survival and their contribution to the Strand:

I believe that this exhibition belongs in the heart of the wider community as a symbol of the remarkable capacity to survive, the anchor provided by your faith, the dedication of your community and the richness of your traditions and culture. Indeed, at last the first inhabitants of the Strand have been justly honored.

The committee circulated my letter in the community. It was read on radio, published in the newspaper and used as part of a document to appeal for a public display of the photo exhibition. In support of the fundraising for a building project at the school, Jaco and I decided to organize a function where more people could witness the Muslim community's story. Mr. Fanie and Mr. Rhoda collaborated with us in a Bridge Building Function, attended by members of the

white community (mainly colleagues, friends and members of the Helderberg Dutch Reformed church) and the Muslim community. The photo exhibition was on display. This provided an opportunity for stories of the community's history to be shared and witnessed. Mr. Rhoda spoke about his research while Mr. Fanie and I shared the stories of our meaningful collaboration. The two communities shared a traditional Cape Malay meal and were entertained by a Malay choir. We received letters of reflection from many of the participants. White participants voiced their sadness at the injustices of the past and the joy they had experienced in sharing time together. A Muslim participant wrote about "feeling proud to be a Muslim". Photos and letters from the Bridge Building Function now also form part of the historic photo exhibition.

Illustrative example 2: Participating as supervisor in an African community

The narrative therapy training workshops and consultation groups for colleagues which I started in 1999 were part of my response to Stevens' (2001) challenge that: "For all the rhetoric about training clinicians who can relevantly meet the needs of the majority of blacks in South Africa, clinical training has remained largely westernized and mainstream." Mainstream interventions are often inappropriate in low-income settings where psychological distress is frequently related to structural issues such as poverty and unemployment etc. I have been contracted to teach narrative therapy in two psychology and two pastoral therapy masters' courses at three universities. Through the Other-wise¹ initiative I offer sponsorship to black colleagues and colleagues working in disadvantaged communities to enable them to participate in the training courses I run. My motivation for this is three-fold. Firstly, by including their voices and experiences I raise awareness about structural injustices. Diversity amongst participants assists in the accountable challenging of pro-racist ideology and enhances racial sensitivity (Hardy & Lazloffy, 2008; Hardy & McGoldrick, 2008). Secondly, I want to do restitution for the ways in which I was a beneficiary of apartheid. My people (the Afrikaners) and my church (DRC) supported apartheid; and my profession (Psychology) "has mirrored salient discriminatory and oppressive processes associated with 'race', class and gender divides" (Suffla, Stevens & Seedat 2001). Thirdly, I hope to redress some of the imbalances which discriminatory practices (such as those arising from an inferior education system) have had on my black colleagues.

¹ I use other-wise to indicate wisdom of the other like money-wise etc.

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I met Ms. Matholeni, a Xhosa student who grew up in poverty in the Eastern Cape, when I taught a Masters program for pastoral therapists at Stellenbosch University. A sole parent at the time, Ms. Matholeni came to Cape Town with her pre-school daughter where she found employment as a domestic worker. Financial support from her employer's friends gave her the opportunity to study theology. With great courage and commitment she completed a four year degree and became a pastor in the Baptist Church. As my own life had been painfully affected by the decision to exclude women from ordained ministry in the DRC until 1990, teaching a diverse group of students in the Faculty of Theology - where for many years only white men trained to become Dutch Reformed ministers - was filled with significance. When Ms. Matholeni expressed an interest in continuing training and supervision with me I offered her sponsorships. She now works in an African township in our area as the first qualified African counselor to work for PATCH, an organization that provides services to children who have been sexually abused.

Ms. Matholeni consulted me in a supervision session about a young Xhosa girl who had been raped for a second time. The girl found it difficult to attend Silukhanyo Primary School, a school for Xhosa learners, because one of the teachers physically resembled the perpetrator of the rape. All Ms. Matholeni's efforts to assist this girl in drawing a distinction between the perpetrator and the teacher had failed. Her schoolwork was suffering, as was the counseling which took place at school. I asked Ms. Matholeni what she knew about the teacher. I thought it would be helpful to make him into a "real person" rather than focusing on him as a man who looked like the perpetrator. Neither Ms. Matholeni nor the girl knew anything about him. This was clearly problematic. I discussed with Ms. Matholeni whether it would be possible to introduce herself to the teacher and assess his willingness to assist her client in a process of getting to know him as a person. We speculated about how this could be done without further traumatizing her client. We thought that Ms. Matholeni could meet the teacher and, with her client's permission, inform him of the problem. She could then ask if he would be willing to participate in a witnessing ceremony (White 2007) where, in the girl's presence, some of the learners who knew him well could speak about their experience of him as a teacher. This way, Ms. Matholeni's client did not have to interact with the teacher directly, but could be a witness to other young girls talking about their experience of him. We carefully discussed the risks involved. Ms. Matholeni was concerned that the teacher would be angry and refuse to participate in this rather unusual process. What if he did not have a good relationship with his

learners? Ms. Matholeni decided to take the risk as her client was desperately keen to attend school.

When her client heard about the plan she was fearful about the teacher's response, but willing to take the risk. She pointed out the male teacher to Ms. Matholeni who then introduced herself to Mr. Majingo, the Deputy Principal of the school. Mr. Majingo admitted afterwards his initial shock at hearing about this learner's fear. He knows that he is a caring and loving teacher who would never do anything to harm a learner. He managed to calm himself down as he felt sad for the girl who was so traumatized and wanted to help her. Mr. Majingo explained to his learners about the girl who was afraid of him and that he needed them to tell her about his "other side". Five girls volunteered to participate in the witnessing ceremony. Ms. Matholeni introduced her client to the group and explained to the girls what had happened. They responded by sharing moving personal stories about Mr. Majingo's caring and kind ways. The girls said that he was like a father to them. Mr. Majingo was so touched by these testimonies of his life as a teacher that he started crying. One of the girls said that she had also been raped. She had not spoken about this before. Ms. Matholeni noticed how her client's face changed as she became increasingly engaged in the stories that the other girls were telling. Mr. Majingo responded by sharing the story of his own childhood. He and his five siblings grew up with his mother in a single-roomed hut in the Eastern Cape. He spoke about his dream of becoming a teacher, but, because he had no money he had had to work for a construction firm before he could go to college. Ms. Matholeni said that she was deeply moved to see a Xhosa man cry in the presence of a woman and his learners. She also felt a strong bond in the group as she was reminded of her own childhood and realized that they all share this experience of poverty.

After this ceremony the young client developed a warm relationship with Mr. Majingo. Instead of being someone she feared he now became her ally at school. In addition, she had been joined very strongly by the other girls who shared stories of hardship from their own lives. Ms. Matholeni reported that this ceremony contributed significantly to her client's progress and happiness. Mr. Majingo was so moved by the experience that he told Mr. Mbalula, the school's principal, about Ms. Matholeni's work. They discussed the obvious need to help children who had experienced sexual violence.

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As supervisor, I usually visit the communities where my colleagues and students work in order to experience their contexts firsthand and as act of accountability to the community regarding the effect of our participation (Waldegrave, 2003). I met Mr. Mbalula during such a visit to the school. He told me that he had come to understand their task at school as more than just teaching children academic work. Teachers can also assist children to learn when they become involved in the problems which children faced outside the school. Mr. Mbalula invited Ms. Matholeni to address the staff about sexual abuse so as to raise their awareness. She also addressed a meeting of the Governing Body of the school who subsequently granted Ms. Matholeni permission to hold parent meetings about her work. Ms. Matholeni has a strong commitment to revive the spirit of *ubuntu* in the urban townships, to encourage people to look out for one another and to make their streets and neighborhoods safer. She now supports a network of parents who share this dream. Ms. Matholeni was given an office when the school moved to new premises, whereas in the past she had had to consult with children in her car. Staff members and parents report that they feel more empowered to take action when they become aware of incidents of abuse. Ms. Matholeni has started a support group for girls who have been sexually abused.

Discussion of examples

For most of my life I experienced black people as so completely different that they became dehumanized and therefore almost invisible to me (Weingarten, 2003). In a context where trust has been broken and society is still organized along racial and social class structures it requires conscious and continuous effort to participate with “the other”. As a beneficiary of a system that impoverished black people, I want to make restitution for past injustices (Maluleke, 2008). In these two examples I have described my participation with “the other” in acts of “giving back” (Tutu 1991) through volunteering time and expertise to a colored community (the Strand Muslim community) and to an African colleague (as Ms. Matholeni’s supervisor).

In a participatory approach the personal is professional and political (Weingarten, 1997). My personal experience of oppression as a woman in a patriarchal Christian culture informed my response to Ms. Matholeni’s request for mentoring (Hanisch, 2009). By sharing personal stories from opposite sides of the apartheid divide we transcended the division between

personal and professional life in the Muslim community. I moved beyond my professional boundaries by collaborating with people from other professions and by including my husband and members of my community in acts of witnessing and collaboration. Mr. Majingo and Ms Matholeni used their personal experiences of poverty to join the children in the witnessing ceremony.

Ackermann (1998) insists that the power to love one another, as well as the power to hurt or injure one another, begins in our bodies. I agree with her; the work of justice and healing is “body work” just as much as the struggle for liberation of South Africa called for committed bodies. My embodied participation in the heart of the Muslim community took me out of the comfort of my consultation room and required stepping out of traditional “therapy roles” as illustrated by my participation in the stealing work, Heritage Day celebration, Bridge Building function and conversations with Mr. Fanie and Mr. Rhoda. My letter to the Heritage Day committee, which was used to raise public awareness and rectify past injustice, was an embodied act of restitution. As part of the public exhibition it now serves as a physical testimony of a white person’s commitment to acknowledging the injustices and testifies to the community’s remarkable survival. The physical evidence of the Bridge Building function (photos and letters) tells the story of healing through embodied participation across the racial and religious divide. Ms. Matholeni also embodied care for her client when she moved beyond the safety of her individual counseling sessions to meet Mr. Majingo face-to-face and set up the witnessing session.

Reflecting on my participation in the Muslim school, Mr. Fanie commented: “I appreciate that you never told us what to do, but always asked what we think could work best and how it would fit with our ways and beliefs.” By collaborating with cultural consultants (Waldegrave, 2003), I positioned myself as an ally *working with* them rather than an expert *acting on* them (Madsen, 2007). This enabled an honoring of the community’s experiences and meaning patterns. The communities of concern that supported the boys in regaining honesty reputations (Epston, 1999) reflect the expanded conceptualization of family to include those who might serve as a resource to the boys’ lives (Madsen, 2007). Their participation delighted and surprised me as they brought expertise and resources that I could never have imagined! Ms. Matholeni raised my awareness about discourses within Xhosa culture. She pointed out how significant it was for gender relations that Mr. Majingo, a Xhosa man, allowed himself to cry in

the presence of Ms. Matholeni, a woman, and his (female) pupils. A participatory approach challenges Western individualistic self-understandings and acknowledges our interrelatedness – ubuntu - as humans. Tutu (1999) articulates ubuntu as: “I am human because I belong. I participate. I share.” Ms. Matholeni explained afterwards that in the witnessing meeting Mr. Majingo’s childhood story of poverty and hardship triggered memories of her own childhood. Their common experience of poverty in the group served to strengthen their experience of ubuntu. She said that western understandings of confidentiality and stigmatization disappeared in the spirit of ubuntu, where everybody took hands and the individual’s pain became everyone’s pain.

Ms. Matholeni corroborated that when I participated with her in her work for PATCH, I extended my expertise into the township community. She agrees with Weingarten (2000) that “matters of life and death are too hard, too onerous, too painful to ‘do’ alone.” She testifies to the way in which our relationship strengthened and supported her in work that is frequently overwhelming in intensity and demand - sexual violence affects more than a third of South African girls before the age of 18 (Jewkes et al, 2009a). Mr. Majingo said that he experienced significant support and acknowledgement for his work as a teacher and felt joined by Ms. Matholeni. He joined her and opened up new possibilities for supporting her work by talking to Mr. Mbalula, the principal. Mr. Mbalula took significant steps to support Ms. Matholeni’s work and to get the community involved in networks that will make it safer for the children of that community. A participatory approach emphasizes the joining of hands which can ripple out in unexpected ways as illustrated here and in the collaboration with Mr. Fanie, David Espton, the communities of concern, Mr. Rhoda, the wider Muslim community and later, the white community.

Hardy (2008: 82) articulates my commitment: “... that we have an ethical imperative to assume an active role in transforming the human condition both within and beyond the walls of therapy.” Our participation in the Heritage Day celebrations presented an opportunity to acknowledge injustices and assume accountability for past traumas in an important ritual of healing (Herman, 1992). My awareness that the problems that I encountered in the Muslim community were symptoms of broader structural injustices - like racism, religious oppression

and poverty - enabled me to take action towards healing and restitution in the wider society (Waldegrave, 2003). The Bridge Building Function gave the Strand Muslim community the opportunity to participate in what the social anthropologist, Barbara Myerhof (1982), calls a “definitional ceremony”: a marginalized group has the opportunity for a collective telling and performance of their understanding of the stories of their lives to an audience who would not otherwise be available. Erstwhile “oppressors” met with formerly “oppressed” and “privileged” with “previously disadvantaged”. The members of both communities who attended were given the opportunity to embody and voice their willingness to reach out to the other and thus to participate together in the healing and transformation of our deeply divided and traumatized society. Godobo-Madikizela (2006) indicates that we will regain our humanity only “through consistent dialogue with one another about our past.” Judging from the feedback, we managed what Hardy (2008) proposes to “jump-start” the healing of strained relationships in our communities – breaking the silence, engaging in healing dialogue, and promoting critical racial introspection.

Ms. Matholeni assisted in the voicing of her client’s sexual trauma, which is so often veiled in silence and secrecy. She raised it with me and then with Mr. Majingo and later with the witnessing group, thereby creating opportunities to re-connect with her community (Herman, 1992). My proposal that she contact Mr. Majingo so as to elicit his support was borne out of the hopeful stance for positive alliances that I hold in my work (Madsen, 2007). The idea for a witnessing ceremony comes from my extensive experience with outsider witness work as described by Michael White (2007). By inviting the children to speak about their experiences of Mr. Majingo, their teacher, Ms. Matholeni challenged the discourses of authoritarianism which are very strong in South African schools (Ramphela, 2008). Ms. Matholeni described her experience of this witnessing ceremony to me afterwards as “the highlight of my counseling career so far.” She attributed this to the openness of the sharing, the deep emotions this evoked in everyone and the shifts in perceptions and relationships that occurred when this kind of sharing happened (White 2007). In his response, Mr. Majingo challenged dominant cultural discourses of masculinity and authority. The girls and Ms. Mathuleni witnessed in him a kind of masculinity that is gentle, vulnerable and caring - a stark contrast to the violence to which some of them had been subjected. Both Mr. Majingo and Ms. Mathuleni serve as role models for the girls on how to overcome poverty and hardship and reach personal goals.

I became a witness to the multiple stories – both painful and hopeful - (White & Epston, 1990) from the Muslim community. I reflected on these in the letter I read at the conference in which I publicly honored Mr. Fanie’s work and that of his staff, and acknowledged the transformative effect this had had on my own life. Given the power difference in our relationship (White, 1997), by acknowledging or “giving back” how my participation had affected my life results in a meaningful shift of power. In contrast to the dominant story of despair regarding education in South Africa (Bloch 2009), theirs was a significantly alternative story (White, 2007). The participation of all citizens in supporting schools fits with researchers’ recommendations (Bloch, 2009; Kamper, 2008) regarding the improvement of our failing school system. I was inspired by Mr. Fanie whose passion for upliftment and pastoral care for his learners represents what Kamper (2008) describes as the characteristic leadership style in successful high-poverty schools. I was privileged to join hands with Mr. Fanie and Mr. Mbalula, both of whom are “adamant about networking for the benefit of the school” (Kamper, 2008). My hope for the future of our country has been strengthened by meeting Mr. Majingo and the teachers at the Muslim school. If the test of teacher excellence in high-poverty schools is “the extent to which the learners experienced that the teachers truly cared for them” (Kamper, 2008), then they have excelled.

CONCLUSION

In many ways the participatory approach that I propose is a counter-cultural practice which, as Prof Jonathan Jansen (2010) insists, must be a feature of leadership for transformation and restitution in post-apartheid South Africa. The movement from being apart to taking part in the wider South African society starts with an increasingly painful awareness of what has been broken, followed by accountability to participate in healing and transformation. Engaging in acts of restitution involves challenging economic orthodoxy and individualistic ideas of professional success. This requires an embodied reaching out to the margins of society and crossing the divides of race, gender, religion, culture and social class. A participatory approach urges us to respond to structural injustices and the problems that arise from these by thinking and acting outside the constraints of our consultation rooms and traditional therapeutic

conversations. By acknowledging our interrelatedness as a society, our own healing becomes bound up with another's, thereby enabling the joining of hands in all the contexts of our participation. Strict boundaries between professional, personal and political become blurred in the commitment to participate with self-reflection and the willingness to allow personal transformation. As we invite communities and colleagues to participate in the voicing of trauma and injustices as well as the enactment of empowered responses, we become de-centered as therapists, trainers and supervisors. Our "other-wisdom" informs the agency for transformation with which we participate in our communities of origin. To participate in this way requires courage, patience and commitment, but it can make significant ripples that bring healing and support "reasonable hope" (Weingarten, 2010).

End note:

*"Black" is used as a generic term for all those who were classified as "non-white" under the apartheid system and, as a result, were disadvantaged and oppressed. When I use the term "African" it is to distinguish the group that would otherwise be called black from South Africa's other major race groups, "Coloureds", "Indians" and "Whites".

** I want to express my sincere appreciation to all the participants, and am pleased to be able to honor them in this manuscript.

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