



An empirical-phenomenological  
study of the experience of  
testifying at the South African  
Truth and Reconciliation  
Commission

R I W THOMSON



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

AN EMPIRICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY  
OF THE EXPERIENCE OF TESTIFYING AT THE  
SOUTH AFRICAN TRUTH AND  
RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

by

**RODNEY IAN WILLIAM THOMSON**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, apart from the quotations acknowledged within it, is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree Doctor Philosophiae (Psychotherapy) in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.



.....  
Rodney Ian William Thomson

28  
..... day of October 1999.

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## ABSTRACT

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) sought to promote healing and reconciliation, and thereby bring closure to a past era of oppression. The process of public testimony was assumed to provide for a revealing of the truth of the period, and to promote forgiveness thus enabling victims to heal from the traumas of the past.

This qualitative study sought to explicate the subjective meaning of the experiences of victims who testified at the TRC. Data derived from transcribed open-ended interviews with twelve victims were analysed using an empirical-phenomenological method. The sample group of 12 volunteers comprised eight black females, two black males, one Indian male and one white female. The subjects were interviewed nine to eighteen months after they had testified as victims at the KwaZulu-Natal regional hearings of the TRC.

The findings of this study challenge the one-dimensional assumption that testifying at the TRC would promote a therapeutic outcome for victims. Analysis of the data revealed that public testimony is a dialectic and interpersonally constituted phenomenon, which in certain circumstances may facilitate healing.

Victims described symptoms of anticipatory anxiety, and typically experienced the opportunity to testify as an “approach-avoidance” phenomenon. The TRC was perceived with the potential either to bring closure to the past, or to re-open old wounds without meeting the raised expectations for justice to be served and reparations to be provided. Victims experienced secondary traumatisation as they testified and simultaneously bore witness to their painful life-stories. The circumstances for a therapeutic outcome emerged as those in which forgiveness could take place through hearing the confession of a perpetrator, or through dialogue with a significant other who could stand for the perpetrator. In either case, an acknowledgement of the truth was required as a co-constituted reality.

The study concludes with a call for post-testimony psychological support for victims given the limited resources of the TRC to provide follow-up counselling services.



## **KEY TERMS**

TRUTH

RECONCILIATION

FORGIVENESS

TESTIMONY

TRAUMA

DIALOGUE

HEALING

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

STORY TELLING

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

## OPSOMMING

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Waarheids- en Versoeningskommissie (W.V.K.), het gepoog om genesing en versoening te bevorder om sodoende die gordyn toe te trek oor 'n verlede van onderdrukking. Die proses van openbare getuienis was veronderstel om die waarheid van die era te openbaar en vergiffenis in die hand te werk. Dit sou die trauma's van die verlede heel.

Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie gee 'n uiteensetting van die subjektiewe betekenis wat die slagoffers, wat getuig het, aan die gebeure geheg het. Gegewens wat verkry is tydens ongestruktureerde onderhoud met twaalf slagoffers, is ontleed by wyse van 'n empiries-fenomenologiese metode. Die steekproef van twaalf vrywilligers het bestaan uit agt swart vroue, twee swart mans, een Indiër man en een blanke vrou. Die deelnemers is tussen nege en twaalf maande na hulle getuienisse voor die KwaZulu-Natal streekverhore van die W.V.K. te woord gestaan.

Die bevindinge van hierdie studie bevraagteken die een-dimensionele aanname dat openbare getuienis voor die kommissie 'n terapeutiese uitkoms vir die slagoffers tot gevolg het. Ontleding van die getuienis toon dat openbare getuienis 'n dialekties-en-interpersoonlik-gekonstitueerde fenomeen is wat in sekere omstandighede genesing sou kon fassiliteer.

Slagoffers beskryf simptome van antisiperende angs, en beleef, op tipiese wyse, die geleentheid om te getuig, as 'n toenadering-vermyding-fenomeen. Die W.V.K. is gesien as die instrument waardeur die verlede of afgesluit sou word, of waardeur die ou wonde weer oopgekrap sou word sonder dat dit die verhoogde verwagting na geregtigheid sou dien en rekonsilliasie sou bring. Slagoffers ervaar sekondêre traumatisering gedurende hulle getuienis en gee terselfdertyd getuienis van hul pynlike lewensverhale. Die omstandighede vir 'n terapeutiese uitkoms verskyn soos diegene in wie vergiffenis kan plaasvind deur die aanhoor van 'n bekentenis deur 'n oortreder, of deur dialoog met die beduidende ander, wat as oortreder kan instaan. In beide gevalle is 'n erkenning van die waarheid as ko-konstituerende realiteit nodig.

Die studie sluit af met die aanbeveling dat sielkundige onderskraging vir die slagoffers na die lewering van hul getuienis voorsien behoort te word, veral in die lig van die beperkte middele wat die W.V.K. tot sy beskikking het om opvolgberadingsdienste te voorsien.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Overview

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was brought into being by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995. The act charged the TRC with “investigating and documenting gross human rights abuses committed within or outside South Africa in the period 1960 – 1994” (TRC Report, 1998, p.4)

The TRC received over 20 000 statements of gross violations of human rights, over 7 000 applications for amnesty, and heard about 2 000 public testimonies of human rights violations (Tutu, 1998, p.2). The Chairman of the TRC Archbishop Tutu (1996, p.5) stated at the commencement of the commission that “It is absolutely central to our concern to help our land and people to achieve genuine, real reconciliation”.

Hence it may be concluded that the aim of the Act, and objective of the TRC was to provide a place for perpetrators and victims to tell the truth. The assumption was that the telling of the truth would enable healing through forgiveness and promote national reconciliation. Tutu (1996, p.6) stated that “To be able to forgive one needs to know whom one is forgiving and why ... this is why the truth is so central to this whole exercise”.

The TRC not only represents a historically unique public record of the sufferings of victims and guilt of the perpetrators. It also seeks to promote healing through forgiveness which is assumed to follow when victims are accorded the opportunity to speak their “truth” and be heard in this case in a public forum officiated by legal designates. In a private place, the practice of psychotherapy creates the conditions for the patient to tell his/her story, and to be heard. Kruger (1988) states that it is the

task of the psychologist to “create the conditions which make it possible for the subjects to reveal their concerns”. Halling (1996) extends this analogy further by placing the notion of story and of story-telling as central to the phenomenological and narrative perspectives in psychology. Halling (1996, p.3) states that “truth, as I speak of it, presupposes a witness”, and explicates the role of the researcher as essentially that of a witness, without whom there is no truth nor research.

The victims who told their stories at the TRC were either persons who had been detained and tortured, or were relatives of deceased victims. Romanyshyn (1996, p.2) extends the analogy of story telling further when he describes psychotherapy as “griefwork ... it is about assisted dying, the craft and practice of letting go”.

This study seeks a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants who testified at the KwaZulu-Natal TRC Regional Hearings of 1996-1997. The aim of the research is to explicate the meaning of testifying for participants. While there are similarities and differences between speaking at the TRC, and speaking in psychotherapy, an understanding of the experiences of the victims who spoke at the TRC will have important implications for psychotherapy as a healing practice. From a qualitative research analysis of the participants’ descriptions of their experiences of testifying, this study will seek to explicate the inter-related themes that are common to their experiences. In this research project victims and not perpetrators were interviewed using a qualitative research method. The results will provide a deeper understanding for the general practice of psychotherapy of the nature of subject testimony, and the conditions within which healing may or may not unfold from the telling of the story witnessed as the truth.

This study concludes with an examination of the similarities and differences between the public testimony of the TRC and the private healing of the patients’ story in psychotherapy. The implications of the victims’ experiences of speaking at the TRC, are described for the practise of psychotherapy as a private healing endeavour in the

context of the forgiveness process, and for the public provision of community healing support structures for victims of human rights violations.

## 1.2 Historical context

The question of the healing process of testimony has historical precedent in the hearings of the Chilean Truth and Reconciliation of 1990. Prior to the commencement of the 1996 hearings of the South African TRC, the former secretary to the Chilean TRC was invited to S.A. to speak of the Chilean experience. Correa (1996, p.2) stated that “forgiveness has the power to heal”; that “reconciliation can end suffering”; and that “the healing process is as necessary for the victims as it is for the perpetrators”. The report of the Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Maxwell, 1994) lists the names of the disappeared, and records the evidence spoken by relatives of the disappeared. Correa (1990, p.2) notes that “a major step in the healing process as far as the victims were concerned, was recognition by the state that crimes had been committed in the name of the state”. In deciding on the mechanism for the promotion of national reconciliation through forgiveness, de la Rey and Owens (1998) note that the Chilean model was used to help structure the TRC of South Africa.

Further evidence of the need to speak and be heard as the cornerstones of the healing process is presented in the findings of Gerber, Harrington and Kern (1996). Cambodian survivors of the Pol Pot Holocaust (1975 – 1979) were interviewed about their experience of giving survivor testimony. In discussing what it means to hear survivor testimony Gerber, Harrington and Kern (1996, p.32) conclude that “although there is a transcendent healing quality to the experience, there is also a deficiency in our contemporary discursive abilities to talk of compassion, connection and intimacy”. This research, while validating the healing through speaking findings of the Chilean TRC (Maxwell, 1994), implies further that there is more complexity to survivor testimony than simple relief from being heard. The difficulty of communicating the depth of the experience is evident in this work. In this respect in speaking of the nature of psychotherapy as grief work Romanyshyn (1996, p.2) notes that “the rituals of psychotherapy are rituals of mourning, and language, which holds such a key place

in the talking cure is central to these rituals, to this practice of letting go”. Hence there is a need to study the experiences of victims speaking at the TRC in a way in which both the process of healing, and the difficulty of truly communicating one’s experience of trauma may be understood more fully.

The scholarly research context for this study of victim testimony at the TRC is also indicated by the work of Baures (1996). Baures (1996) elucidates Romanyshyn’s (1996) emphasis on speaking to be heard and to experience healing through a “letting go” process. Baures (1996) research concerned the healing efforts of community centres in Vietnam working with survivors of the war. Baures (1996) notes that in her interviews with twenty survivors of extreme trauma, the recovery process was characterised by initial feelings of hate towards abusers, which needed to be verbalised. However, those who made positive transformations all found that articulation of the trauma needed to be followed by ways of letting go of their bitterness. Baures (1996, p.75) states that those who made positive transformations “learned that to forgive did not mean to condone unjust behaviour, but let go of their need to judge themselves and others”. This research study’s enquiry into the TRC hearings will investigate Baures’ (1996) finding of the need to let go of judging oneself and others, and ask how this process may take place, and what this understanding may mean for the practise of psychotherapy.

### **1.3 Summary of the approach**

Giorgi (1983, p.154) writes that while scientific knowledge is “systematically and methodologically derived; there is hardly an area of psychology which is limited to a single method, let alone techniques or procedures”. Hence in the social as opposed to the natural sciences the research method tends to be determined by the nature of the question being asked.

The guiding question of this study concerns the experience of speaking at the TRC. This study is interested in the shift in perception that the experience of speaking held

for the victims. Giorgi (1983) describes phenomenological psychological research as a method towards an explication of this shift in terms of a change in the person's lived experience. The research question thus asks about the implicit meaning for participants of the experience of speaking at the TRC. Hence the research path to the answer lies in the common experiences, and the consistent ways in which participants made meaning of their experience. One may ask how the event changed the ways in which the participants now live their lives, shifts of which they may be aware and unaware.

The subjects' descriptions of their lived experiences thus become the source of data, rather than a measured shift in behaviour which may be assumed to correlate with the TRC experience. Polkinghorne (1989) characterises descriptive research as usually referring to inquiries whose goal is to give a neutral, close, and thorough account of the topic. This research project is a preliminary effort to understand the experience of speaking at the TRC. Hence descriptive research is required as a first step towards a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of subject testimony, rather than quantitative research measuring the statistical chance of a particular behavioural pattern occurring. In clarifying the conditions for the selection of a qualitative method Polkinghorne (1989, p.175) states that "instead of approaching topics with predetermined hypotheses, they look to discover the essential attributes of phenomena, and then express the results in verbal portraits".

A second pragmatic factor influencing this study's choice of a qualitative research method concerns the situation of the subjects. Smaling (1992, p.2) states that "in a laboratory situation several standardised and quantitative procedures are possible and adequate, while in a naturalistic situation qualitative methods might be more adequate, because of the fact that some qualitative methods are less obtrusive than a standardised questionnaire". The experience of speaking at the TRC, is clearly a lived and public experience which will have profound implications for participants. Hence it is more useful in the initial stages of an understanding of the experience, to

illicit the fundamental constituents through rigorous analysis of the subject's descriptions.

A third pragmatic consideration is the nature of the subjects themselves. The public and legal nature of the TRC hearings led to many of the participants receiving threats of physical harm. Hence the subjects needed to be approached in a place in which trust could be engendered. The confidentiality aspect, and rapport enhancing possibilities of a research interview with a licensed psychologist, was the preferred option to a mailed or administered questionnaire. Another factor indicating the choice of a qualitative research interview concerned the semi-literacy of many of the participants, which would have made questionnaire completion impossible.

Consideration of the overall research goal is the final pragmatic consideration that has influenced this study's choice of a qualitative research method. The research goal is to investigate the experience of speaking at the TRC from the standpoint of healing and forgiveness that was assumed to follow from the process of victim testimony. Parallels with psychotherapy as griefwork – the making of a place to tell one's story of loss – have been described above. Hence the implications for therapy with TRC victims, and by implication other survivors of similar trauma, will be drawn from this study. Smaling (1992, p.2) notes that "most researchers recognise the value of qualitative methods for practice – orientated research, especially when this research is action – research in which the investigated subjects function as co-investigators and are interested parties who want to understand and use the results of the investigation". A strong motivating factor for subjects to participate in this research project was their need for on-going therapy post TRC, and to provide information that would be used to help other victims who they believed may also need therapy.

The above pragmatic considerations indicated that the experience of speaking at the TRC, could best be studied by a qualitative approach using the research interview as a method of data gathering.

## CHAPTER 2

### The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

This section situates the TRC in its socio-historical context by referring to the structure of the TRC and its attempts to deal with the psychological consequences of trauma, as it acted as a public place for victims and perpetrators to speak. The historical record of the period is well documented in the TRC report, and will not be repeated in this thesis. The psychological consequences of gross human rights violations, and the possibilities for forgiveness-reconciliation will be summarised as they have been accorded the status of the historical truth of the period by the official report of the TRC (1998).

#### 2.1 Structure

The TRC was established by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995. The five broad objectives of the act, described by the TRC Report (1998, p.4), were:

- (1) to draw as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which took place within the political conflicts of the period 1 March 1960 to 10 May 1994.
- (2) to facilitate the granting of amnesty to persons who made full disclosure relating to (criminal) acts associated with a political objective.
- (3) to restore the human and civil dignity of victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they were victims.
- (4) to make recommendations on suitable measures of reparation and rehabilitation for the victims of gross human rights violations.
- (5) to make recommendations as to how human rights violations could be prevented in the future.

Three standing committees were established as an executive function to achieve the above objectives.

- The Human Rights Violations Committee co-ordinated the public testimony hearings of victims.
- The Amnesty Committee co-ordinated the amnesty hearings for perpetrators, and made recommendations according to the criteria for amnesty.
- The Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee (R.R.C.) co-ordinated the applications for and granting of reparations.

Orr (1998, p.42) as a commissioner commenting on the latter committee's ability to provide adequately for rehabilitation states that "the drafters of the Act failed to recognise the fact that recounting past trauma (for both victims and perpetrators) could be immensely painful and potentially harmful to mental health, and therefore none of the standing committees was given a formal mandate to provide emotional support to those who approached the TRC". However, the R.R.C. was given an informal mandate to ensure that people appearing at the TRC were offered emotional support which Orr (1998, p.42) describes thus:

- training statement takers in basic counselling skills.
- helping statement takers identify those deponents who needed referral for counselling, and providing them with a resource list for this purpose.
- providing specific briefing and debriefing for those witnesses who attended public hearings.
- encouraging deponents to form support groups within their own communities and facilitating training of community members as leaders of these groups.
- arranging follow-up visits to each region where a hearing was held to assess the impact of the hearing and facilitate appropriate intervention.
- engaging society to assist the R.R.C. to provide the above services, and training community members as briefers.

## 2.2 Process

The TRC received over 21 300 statements of gross violations of human rights, over 7 000 applications for amnesty, and heard approximately 2 000 public testimonies of human rights violations (Tutu, 1998, p.2). The above statistics indicate that the

extent and severity of the impact of general violence in South Africa, during the period of review by the TRC, has been severe. In addition, the general lack of an adequate mental health structure pre and post apartheid for the majority of the South African population, indicates that the psychological traumas of exposure to the violence of the period has been largely untreated. The TRC in its function as a safe place, in which victims of all political and social orientations could speak freely, provided the first public recording and exposure of the debilitating consequences of past trauma. Levenstein (1998, p.44) concludes that “the TRC hearings have been extremely important in helping to keep the reality of the suffering of the apartheid era in the national consciousness ... it would be unfortunate, to say the least, if this aspect (national consciousness) were to be ignored and hence for victims to be forgotten”. The proceedings of the TRC record the syndrome of post-traumatic stress disorder in victims of all political spectrums, and in the perpetrators fighting for and against apartheid (Orr, 1998).

Such was the extent of the number of applicants seeking amnesty, or to be heard as victims, that the resources allocated by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 1995 to meet the objectives of the TRC have proved to be inadequate. This lack of allocated resources, and the lack of a general mental health infrastructure, particularly in the rural areas, were major obstacles the R.R.C’s stated efforts to provide emotional support. Orr (1998, p.42) concludes that “the TRC has to acknowledge that it has not adequate resources, time or staffing to address the mental health needs of deponents as effectively as possible.”

### **2.3 Psychological Consequences of Gross Human Rights Violations**

The TRC report attempted to summarise the patterns and trends from a random sample group of 2 000 respondents proportionately weighted according to the regions where the hearings were held. The quantitative research method is not described in the report, although the aim of the questionnaire is described as “focusing on the consequences of the violation(s) as perceived by deponents” (TRC Report, 1998, p.126). Qualitative extracts from deponents’ statements are included in the TRC

report to illustrate the broad psychological trends. The TRC report does caution for possible interviewer and questionnaire bias in the form of written guiding questions that were used in the introduction to the questionnaire. These guiding questions were used to assist psychologically unqualified interviewers who had limited interview training. The following psychological consequences of gross human rights violations are documented in the report as typical trends affecting victims.

### **2.3.1 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.)**

The TRC report states that the majority of South Africans have “had to deal with a psychological stress which has arisen as a result of deprivation and dire socio-economic conditions, coupled with the cumulative trauma arising from violent state repression and intra-community conflicts”. Trauma in the TRC report refers to both physical and psychological injury inflicted by perpetrators of human rights violations.

The TRC Report (1998, p.127) describes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a syndrome whose symptoms were “re-experiencing of the traumatic event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the event, and persistent symptoms of increased arousal not present before the traumatic event”.

The TRC report (1998, p.127) describes this pervasive condition of P.T.S.D. in victims as having 3 basic causes:

- “(a) direct personal experience of an event involving actual or threatened death, serious injury or other threat to physical integrity;
- (b) witnessing an event involving death, injury or threat to the physical integrity of another person;
- (c) learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member of close associate.”

### **2.3.2 Other psychological problems**

The TRC report (1998, p.129) does not provide epidemiological findings, nor any other forms of statistical analysis of the occurrence of P.T.S.D., rather describing the

general occurrence of the following symptoms as consequences of torture and human rights violations:

- sleep disorders;
- sexual dysfunction;
- chronic irritability;
- physical illness;
- disruption of interpersonal relations and occupational, family and social functioning.

Other clinical conditions are described by the TRC Report (1998, p.135) as occurring simultaneously with the P.T.S.D. condition. These included:

- major depression;
- dysthymic disorder;
- anti-social personality disorder;
- substance abuse.

### **2.3.3 Summary of Psychological Consequences**

The following qualitative description is offered by the TRC Report (1998, p.131) as a summary of the above psychological consequences of gross human rights violations.

In the first phase of “incomprehension”, the depth of the painful experience of violation too intense for the victim to cope. The second feature termed “disrupted attachment”, refers to the consequences of the fundamentally altered view of the self and world for the victim. The personal violation leads to altered relationships, particularly where the victim finds himself in an unsafe world. Saporta and van der Kolk (TRC Report, 1998, p.131) describe this as “an inability to turn to others for help or comfort in the aftermath of trauma, which represents the loss of an important resource to help people to cope”. The victim’s feelings of isolation intensify the experience of loss. Hence Saporta and van der Kolk (TRC Report, 1998, p.132) note that victims “tend to alternate between withdrawing socially, and attaching

themselves impulsively to others”. For the victim the manifest result of trauma is an enduring difficulty in forming meaningful or fulfilling relationships.

## **2.4 Reconciliation**

### **2.4.1 Definition**

The TRC Report (1998) does not specifically define its understanding of the meaning of the term “reconciliation”. However the TRC Report (1998, p.350) refers to reconciliation as “a complex long term process with many dimensions”. The TRC Report (1998, p.350) goes on to state that reconciliation is required as a result of “the deep damage indicated by past gross human rights violations on human relationships in S.A.”, the result of which “demands extensive healing and social and physical reconstruction at every level of society”.

From the above two statements, the following aspects of reconciliation can be inferred from the way in which this term is used by the TRC. In the first instance as a complex process, reconciliation may be taken to have levels of meaning, and refer to different levels of relationship.

Reconciliation is taken at a first level of meaning to refer to a process of coming together from which a healing outcome occurs. Hence it may be concluded that violation proceeds reconciliation which in turn promotes healing. The healing possibility as an outcome of reconciliation is captured in the following statement of the TRC report (1998, p.351): “After so long a journey with so many different and challenging experiences, the Commission concluded that all of South Africa ... had been caught up in oppression and resistance that left no one with clean hands, (hence) reconciliation is necessary for all because all need to be healed”.

Secondly, while violation creates the conditions of separation (that then requires reconciliation) the TRC clearly places the telling and witnessing of the truth told as the essential mechanism for healing through reconciliation. The TRC report (1998,

p.351) states that “while truth may not always lead to reconciliation, there can be no genuine, lasting reconciliation without truth”.

Thirdly, reconciliation through the telling of the truth necessarily involves pain and sacrifice. The past pain of gross human rights violations and their effect on individuals, families and communities must be faced through the telling of the stories in a public forum. The cost to perpetrators and witnesses of their painful memories re-visited cannot be avoided by not telling the truth which must be witnessed and recorded. The TRC report (1998, p.351) states that “The Commission believes that reconciliation without cost and pain is cheap, shallow and must be spurned”. The conclusion is that reconciliation as a healing process arises in contrast to the past painful violations unearthed through the process of public testimony.

Fourthly, reconciliation is meaningful in its three pronged effect on both the victims who testified, the perpetrators who heard the victim’s testimony recorded as a public “truth”, and the officials who acted as witnesses for the testimony to be heard in a public forum and be recorded as the “truth”. Reconciliation is first made possible by the speaking of the victims. This public witnessing then engaged the perpetrators who were required to respond. By not responding, the silence in itself presupposes guilt. Those who sought amnesty as perpetrators could seek forgiveness by telling the truth in a public forum. However, the interpersonal situation of truth telling and asking for forgiveness also has a third triangular possibility for reconciliation i.e. in the case of the officials of the TRC acting as witnesses. The TRC report (1998, p.350) states that “those who through the Commission, witnessed the scars on so many human bodies and spirits as well as the deep scars on the country as a whole, found themselves unable to remain onlookers ... they came to acknowledge their own complicity, their own weakness, and accepted their own need for healing”.

The term “reconciliation” as used by the TRC refers not only to the complex levels of meaning discussed above, but also to different levels of relationships. The TRC report (1998, p.350) refers to the importance of “multi-layered healing of human

relationships in post-apartheid S.A.: relationships of individuals with themselves, relationships between victims; relationships between survivor and perpetrators, relationships within families; between neighbours and within and between communities; relationships within different institutions, between different generations, between racial and ethnic groups, between workers and management, and above all, between the beneficiaries of apartheid and those who have been disadvantaged by it”.

## **2.4.2 Towards the Restoration of Human Dignity: Victims**

According to the TRC Report (1998), reconciliation at all levels in South African society as the stated aim of the TRC process, has had three significant outcomes for victims as it attempted to restore their human dignity.

These were, healing through truth telling; decriminalisation of victims who opposed the state; and the exhumation and reburial of the remains of lost loved ones.

### **2.4.2.1 Healing through truth telling**

With regard to the issue of healing through truth telling, the TRC acknowledged that this desired aspect of reconciliation did not occur in totality, but rather remained valued in nature and degree for the victims who spoke. The TRC report (1998, p.350) notes that “clearly, everyone who came before the Commission did not experience healing and reconciliation ... however extracts from testimonies before the Commission illustrate the ways and degrees in which people have been helped by the Commission to restore their human dignity and make peace with their troubled past.”

The extracts contained in the TRC report (1998) illustrate the healing potential of telling of one’s story before an officially constituted forum and in a public place. The TRC report (1998) notes three significant aspects of this storytelling towards the promotion of healing. In the first instance, giving public oral testimony was far more meaningful than merely giving a

private deposition to a legal representative of the state. The TRC report (1998, p.352) notes that “quite often, witnesses revealed far more in oral testimony than they had in their written statements”. Secondly, the power of healing through public telling of one’s story also took place outside of the TRC, as a direct consequence of the positive healing that had originally occurred during the TRC proceedings itself. The TRC report (1998, p.353) describes three such examples, in the Western Cape’s “Healing of Memories” workshops, the work of the S.A. Council of Churches (S.A.C.C.), and Khulumani – a victim support group facilitated by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Gauteng.

Thirdly, the TRC Report (1998) acknowledges that there were significant criticisms and concerns expressed about the public testimony hearings for victims. Shortcomings in the attempts to promote reconciliation and healing included an acknowledgement that some victims who spoke demanded justice and expected retribution. This form of testimony did not seek reconciliation and, hence they were not open to healing in the sense promoted by the TRC. Furthermore the TRC report (1998, p.355) notes that “some psychologists and others expressed concern that adequate professional support was not provided after the hearings”.

The issue of raised expectations of reparations for victims who spoke, also engendered criticism. The TRC report (1998, p.356) does not provide data on the percentage of victims who did eventually receive some form of reparation, preferring rather to state that “a further cause of concern was the inevitably long delay between victim’s testimony of hearings, and the implementation by the state of the Commissions recommendations on reparations and rehabilitation”.

### **2.4.3 Towards the restoration of human dignity: Perpetrators**

The TRC report (1998, p.366) states that “reconciliation meant that perpetrators of gross human rights violations must be given the opportunity to become human again”. In dealing with the issue of reconciliation through the opportunity given to perpetrators to speak and apply for amnesty, the TRC report (1998) identifies two critical aspects of the reconciliation process for perpetrators; the role of forgiveness, and the opportunity for apologies and acknowledgements.

#### **2.4.3.1 Forgiveness**

The TRC report (1998) describes the process of forgiveness as a change of heart towards others of an opposing orientation, in the case of both victims and perpetrators. The TRC report (1998, p.371) states that “despite the terrible stories told by victims, the Commission heard some remarkable evidence of a willingness to forgive”. Much of the testimony given is recorded as a desire to tell the truth within the context of a willingness to forgive, or desire to be forgiven. The TRC (1998) places this notion of truth telling for forgiveness as central to the whole exercise. The TRC report (1998, p.378) states that “A number of statements emphasised the importance of truth in the reconciliation process between victims and perpetrators: in other words, knowing whom to forgive and why the violation(s) took place”.

#### **2.4.3.2 Apologies and Acknowledgements**

The TRC report (1998) notes that it heard numerous acknowledgements from individuals and institutions about their direct or indirect involvement in gross human rights violations. The TRC report (1998, p.382) states that “Many offered unqualified apologies for their acts of commission and/or omission and asked for forgiveness ... while the response of others was qualified”.

The TRC report (1998), offers examples of apologies from individual perpetrators and institutions, but does not detail the issue of potential state prosecution of perpetrators either applying for amnesty or of those

subpoenaed to give evidence for their alleged involvement in gross human rights violations. The issue of referral for prosecution following confession, has been a controversial part of the TRC process, and one which may have compromised the telling of the truth by perpetrators, the fabrication or distortion of testimony by victims seeking revenge to motivate for prosecution, and hampered the reconciliation process itself as the central aim of the TRC.

Nevertheless the TRC report (1998, p.392) notes that “although it was not part of the Commission’s mandate to effect reconciliation between victims, the community and perpetrators, there were a number of significant instances where the Commission directly facilitated the beginning of this complex process”. The TRC report (1998) also records instances in which reconciliation between individuals and within communities has occurred without forgiveness or truth telling at the TRC proceedings. The TRC report (1998, p.400) under the heading “reconciliation without forgiveness” states that “the above-mentioned emphasis on peaceful or non-violent co-existence suggests that a weak or limited form of reconciliation may often be the most realistic goal towards which to strive ... this form of reconciliation without apologies by those responsible or forgiveness by victims is also reflected in individual testimonies”.

## **2.5 Recommendations**

The TRC concludes its report (1998) with numerous recommendations of which the central aim is to promote reconciliation through the twin processes of (a) recording of witness testimony as an historical legacy and reminder of the past, and (b) the granting of reparations to victims and efforts towards restitution for those who suffered losses from the effects of apartheid discrimination. The TRC report (1998, p.304) opens its section of recommendations thus: “The Commission believing that reconciliation is a process vital and necessary for enduring peace and stability...” and continues “In order to give expression to this commitment, we request the President

South Africa to call a National Summit on Reconciliation”. The National Summit is to be called towards the end of 1999 to consider ways to implement the recommendations of the TRC report (1998), and to attempt to involve as many representatives of all sectors of society in the state’s central aim of reconciliation.

The way forward is clearly illustrated through a process of dialogue with the past. The notion of truth telling, or witnessing of testimony is taken to an important next step when this past historical record of human rights violations is used as the cornerstone to contrast and thereby attempt to cement a dialectically opposed future based on reconciliation. Commenting on its call for a summit towards the end of 1999, the TRC report (1998, p.305) states that “South Africa, on the eve of a new millennium, should recommit itself to a future characterised by reconciliation and unity by:

- re-looking at the haunting memories of conflicts and division;
- opening our eyes to the legacies of the past”

### **2.5.1 Prevention of Gross Human Rights Violations in the Future**

The recording of the Commission’s proceedings in the TRC report (1998), and in other forms including audio and video tapes was recommended not only as a public reminder of the past, but also as an attempt to develop a human rights culture based on reconciliation. In an attempt to ensure that there would be no repetition of the past, the TRC report (1998, p.308) recommended entrenching a strong human rights culture through the following:

- Government attempts to accelerate the closing of the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged, by transforming education, provision of shelter, access to clean water and health services and the creation of job opportunities;
- Proposing a wealth tax;
- Introducing community policing to address the unacceptably high rate of serious crime;

- A ruthless stand against inefficiency, corruption and maladministration in public and private sectors;
- Entrenching human rights by protecting the rule of law in the Constitution.

### **2.5.2 Reparations and Rehabilitation**

The granting of reparation awards to victims of gross human rights violations, according to the TRC report (1998, p.312) “adds value to the ‘truth-seeking phase’ by:

- (a) enabling the survivors to experience in a concrete way the state’s acknowledgement of wrongs done...;
- (b) restoring the survivors’ dignity;
- (c) affirming the values, interests, aspirations and rights advanced by those who suffered;
- (d) raising consciousness about the public’s moral responsibility to participate in healing the wounded, and facilitate nation-building.”

The issue of reparations for witnesses giving testimony has raised controversy for two reasons. In the first instance, the expectation of a payment for testimony raises questions about possible underlying motivations to tell the truth – as desired for the purposes of healing and reconciliation, or for financial reward. Secondly, the criteria and time limit for application to be declared a victim of “gross human rights violations”, has meant that many expectations of victims for reparation will not be met. Hence the above non-financial reasons for granting of reparations including acknowledgement of injustice, restoration of dignity, affirmation of human rights, and raising of public consciousness, may be partially lost to non-recipients.

In her position as a TRC Commissioner and member of the Human Rights Violations Committee, Burton (1998, p.7) comments that “one of the hardest task in the TRC is making a decision, or a ‘finding’, that what someone has suffered is not a ‘gross violation’ ... and one of the saddest tasks is informing the person that he or she is therefore not a ‘victim’ (and so will not be eligible for reparations)”. The reasons

for non-eligibility include the following categories; that the violations took place outside of the time period of the law (1 March 1960 to 10 May 1994); the incident may not be considered severe enough to qualify as a “gross violation”; the incident did not have a political motive; where the victim was an active combatant serving in the S.A.D.F., M.K. or A.P.L.A.; and where the information given in the statement is insufficient to reach a decision.

Mkhize (1998), as chairperson of the R.R.C., has concluded that the issue of reparations and psycho-social support should have been organised for victims before the hearings took place. Mkhize (1998, p.5) states that “there should have been resources from the beginning to assist people to restore their dignity” and comments that “we lost an opportunity within the Commission to ensure that there were was a reparation panel so that as victims came out of the TRC process they were referred for assistance”.

In April 1998, the Government passed regulations entitling TRC deponents declared victims in accordance with the Act governing the Commission to receive Interim Reparations. The announcement, while seeking to deal with the above-mentioned delays in the granting of reparations did raise expectations, and suffered a lack of budget. Allowance was made for interim payment of R2 000-00 per person and approximately 2 000 reparation Application Forms were sent out to deponents whom the TRC found to have suffered gross violations of human rights. Orr (1998, p.3) in her capacity as deputy chairperson of the R.R.C. summarised the difficulty facing the R.R.C. committee as follows: “The budget for the implementation of the proposed cash grant is R3 billion over 6 years, that is R500 million per year ... so far only R600 million has been allocated by the Department of Finance spread over the next three years”.

### **2.5.3 Mental Health**

The TRC report (1998) in its recommendations gave the provision of appropriate and sufficient mental health services a priority. The TRC report (1998, p.337) states that

“Mental health be given a priority as a national concern and be brought into the primary health care system” adding that “Mental health services should be accessible to all South Africans, with particular emphasis on rural areas”.

In order to achieve these aims the TRC report (1998, p.337) suggests that new therapy models be used which could provide the following improvements:

- A shift from the one-on-one therapy model to become community based;
- Traditional and indigenous forms of treatment be used;
- Involvement of community counselors and family members;
- Development of culturally appropriate psychometric tests;
- Increasing research into the consequences of trauma related to the experience of violence, and a more wide sharing of the research and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The TRC report (1998) extends its recommendations on mental health treatment to include the provision of clinics and appropriate services and facilitate the rehabilitation of perpetrators through psychiatric and psychological counselling.

#### **2.5.4 Conclusions**

The TRC report (1998) makes recommendations to facilitate reconciliation and national healing that cover other broad and diverse areas not mentioned in the above sections, which have focussed specifically on the psychological areas of TRC’s recommendation. These include the roles of public administration, faith communities and religious bodies, business, legal and judicial, training and education, security forces, medical, media and apologies to neighbouring states.

In its concluding paragraph on recommendations, the TRC report (1998, p.349) reiterates its call for reconciliation based on the development of a human rights culture when it states that “Reconciliation is a process which is never ending, is costly and often painful ... for this process to develop it is imperative that democracy and a human rights culture be consolidated”.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Truth, Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

This chapter presents a review of recent literature in psychology dealing with the interrelated themes of truth, forgiveness and reconciliation as they form the focus of concern of this research study.

#### **3.1 Truth**

A computer aided search of the psychological literature since 1970 identified less than 15 publications where the words “truth” or “witness” appeared in the title. Only one empirical study of the TRC was identified. The study by de la Rey and Owens (1998), used a narrative method within the broad framework of social constructivism, to analyse the testimony transcripts of TRC participants and transcripts of interviews with officials. Other published literature on the TRC has taken the form of critical opinion, predominantly concerned with the nature of public testimony, and the effects of secondary traumatising from testifying at the TRC. A qualitative summary of the psychological support services provided by the TRC was published by Hamber (1998). This study may be termed objectivistic in orientation as it approached the notion of “truth” as an observable and recordable reality, given Hamber’s (1998) conclusion that the support services have been largely inadequate.

Other articles commenting on the need for further support services for TRC participants include those of Stein (1996) and Orr (1998) which implicitly approach the notion of “truth” in the form of witness testimony from an objective viewpoint. One psychoanalytically orientated article on the TRC by Hayes (1998), has also called for the need to provide participants with long term therapy to work through the meaning of their experience of testifying rather than to rely on public testimony itself as a sufficient method of healing by catharsis. In this respect Hayes (1998) indirectly places the notion of truth as an intrapsychic reality, the meaning of which needs to

be worked through in the psychotherapeutic endeavour. The remaining article about the TRC is that of Gobodo-Madikizela (1977) which takes the form of a reactive argument by the author as a TRC commissioner, against public criticism of the efforts of the TRC to promote truth and healing through the medium of public testimony.

The remaining articles refer to psychological research studies of witness competency and reliability as the criterion for “truth”, in the legal context of court-room testimony (Bermant, 1974; Kebbell and Wagstaff, 1997; Horowitz et al, 1997; Gudjonsson and Gunn, 1982). These studies reflect the predominance of the objectivistic viewpoint in psychology, which assumes the existence of absolute “observed” reality, in this case to be determined by concurrent validity of multiple witness testimony.

A singular exception to the predominance of the objectivistic, and social constructivistic driven research approaches to the study of witness testimony, is the research study of Espin (1993). Using a qualitative method, Espin (1993) argues for the role of the psychological researcher as a valid and reliable witness in her research on the experiences of women in minority groups, and thus places the notion of “truth” in the interpersonal context of that which is validated by a significant other. Espin’s (1993) approach to the truth in the context of an interpersonal witnessing places her work as phenomenological in nature.

In contrast to the absolutist perspective, phenomenology approaches “truth” through an attempt to understand the world as experienced by the person. Phenomenology is described by Giorgi (1983, p.46) as “the study of the phenomena of the world as experienced by human beings”. In contrast to the social constructivistic perspective, while also concerned with the notion of story telling, phenomenology is concerned with the story that emerges in dialogue with the person. The truth from this perspective is an engaged understanding about an event that is uncovered as the full understanding of its meaning and emerges in the dialogue that takes place between the testifier and witness. In contrast to this notion of an “engaged” understanding of truth as it emerges between the participants, the narrative viewpoint espoused by

social constructionism is concerned with truth through an analysis of the written text. In contrast to the study of de la Rey and Owens (1998) which analysed transcripts of participant testimony (and interviewed commissioners who acted as witnesses), this present study is the first known of its kind to interview directly victims who testified at the TRC.

This present study approached the notions of truth and testimony from a phenomenological perspective since in common with the study of Espin (1993), the researcher attempted to gain access to the truth through dialogue, to gain meaning-giving descriptions from the victims about their experiences of testifying at the TRC. Furthermore the descriptions were shared with the researcher in the context of an interpersonal relationship i.e. were verbalised by the victims and “witnessed” by the research rather than observed dispassionately or analysed as transcripts of the proceedings. While the phenomenological and narrative viewpoints are both concerned with an understanding of the subject’s story, the latter approach seeks “truthful” (reliable and valid) observation through a hermeneutic analysis of the testimony material. The process of detached analysis represents the path to the truth in the latter case, while for phenomenology it is the shared, interpersonal understanding that reveals the truth as it arises between the participants. The experience of giving testimony at the TRC, is concerned with the notion of “truth”. Thus Halling (1996, p.3) states that “truth, as I speak of it, presupposes a witness”, and adds that “this notion of ‘participant-observer’ has been particularly helpful in directing our attention to the relationship between researcher and subject”. Phenomenology thus gives credence to the intersubjective meaning-giving role of the relationship, but in common with social constructivism gives credence to the broader socio-historical context that shapes the shared world of the participants engaged in giving and hearing testimony.

From the above it is clear that the implications of the phenomenological viewpoint, for the TRC as a healing endeavour and its attempts to record the historical “truth” of the period, are profound.

In the first instance the distinction between “observer” and “witness” brings into focus the role of the officials serving on the TRC. From an objectivistic – legal viewpoint the truth is divorced from and thus unaffected by the role of the observer. Considerations of selection and the role of officials are from this viewpoint secondary to the potentially meaning shaping role that they could play from a phenomenological understanding of the truth as “participant-witness” defined. Marcel (1991) notes that the witness, in contrast to the observer, brings one’s whole person to the event, and in the process of speaking of what one has witnessed takes responsibility for the consequences. Testimony for Marcel (1991) is more than observer indifference, it requires a taking of personal responsibility which is valued in terms of one’s identity as one is known by one’s fellows. Thus we may say that testimony is inter-personal and requires a responsibility to that which is revealed in open dialogue with others after the observed event. Truth is understood from the process of dialogue that is ongoing and meaningful in terms of interpersonal interaction. In the context of psychotherapy, Romanyshyn (1996) states that the witness must be a person of character, who by his presence opens a space for the stories to be told. The intersubjective element in the nature of truth as “testimony” means that the witness is engaged by the telling of the event, just as the subject originally participated in its unfolding. Not only does this notion of participation contrast with the objectivistic position, but also implies that the witness be personally open to others in hearing their stories. Marcel (1991) asserts that the witness in being open to receive, brings a capacity to affirm the other in their inherent humanness. Marcel’s (1991) analysis of the nature of testimony indicates that there is a higher meaning to testimony, which relates to forgiveness and how this occurs in the telling of the truth. The conclusion is that the giving of testimony involves the whole person in the sense that it calls forth a validation in relation to the identity of the witness. This validation by the witness of the experience of the subject transcends the event itself, and in this assuming of responsibility to hear the story, allows for a shared higher meaning to come forth. Healing can in this sense be described as a revelatory moment in which

through dialogue a deeper communion and future role is revealed beyond the immediately observed event.

In the second instance, a phenomenological viewpoint places truth within a social and historical context. The events and experiences described in witness testimony are a reflection of the meaning made of them by the participants. The testimony of victims at the TRC concerned their experiences in the struggle for democracy. The testimony of the TRC was in turn largely witnessed by past participants of the struggle. These included past political activists, religious leaders in the struggle, lawyers and psychologists who had been marginalised by the apartheid regime. Truth in the context of the TRC was shaped by (a) religious belief that the path to reconciliation is through testimony, which enables parties to forgive one another; and (b) political motivation to effect reconciliation and prevent future human rights violations by publically recording victim and perpetrator testimony. In the latter instance, Hamber (1998) argues that it was the predominantly legal framework of the TRC, which along with an enormous workload, led to an ambivalent stance on the part of the TRC towards providing post-testimony psychological support.

### **3.2 Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Forgiveness has received little theoretical attention in psychology, and generated even less empirical research (Rowe, Halling, Davies, Leifer, Powers and van Bronkhurst, 1989; Fow, 1996). Furthermore Fow (1996) argues that there has been considerable variance in the way in which the terms forgiveness and reconciliation and their relationship have been viewed. On the other hand, the central role of forgiveness in psychological healing has paradoxically been almost universally accepted as if it were fully researched and understood in its entirety (Hope, 1987).

In the present study the term “forgiveness” will be taken to refer to this process of transformation involving one’s self, other and worldly relationships. The term “reconciliation” will be taken to refer to the end state of resolution i.e. of having come-together, as opposed to forgiving which involves the process of coming-

together. Rowe et al (1989, p.239) have a similar viewpoint stating that forgiveness “ends in a psychological, if not face-to-face reconciliation with the one who was perceived as hurtful”. Reconciliation will henceforth be referred to as the desired outcome of forgiveness through, among other processes, victim and perpetrator testimony. Reconciliation is discussed in detail in Chapter 2 (section 2.4) in relation to the objectives of the TRC at the personal, community and national levels. Forgiveness, however, has received little attention (section 2.4.3.1). Hence reconciliation will be referred to in this section as the desired interpersonal outcome of forgiveness through witness testimony, and not reviewed again as a separate section. The psychological literature dealing with forgiveness as a process leading to reconciliation will be examined in detail.

Given the limited scope of the literature in psychology dealing with forgiveness (Rowe et al, 1989), this review will concentrate on the process of forgiveness in a healing context, while remaining mindful of the breadth of the phenomenon including; its behavioural manifestations; relationship to other phenomena including blame, revenge, guilt and shame; and its place in theoretical and philosophical discourse. Hence this literature review will place forgiveness in the following four healing contexts: (a) general statements attempting to define forgiveness, (b) literature dealing with the value of forgiveness in human experience, (c) empirical-phenomenological research, and (d) discourse dealing specifically with forgiveness in the counselling process.

### **3.2.1 Definitions**

Hope (1987, p.240) states that “Forgiveness refers to a voluntary act, a decision, a choice made about how a person deals with the past”. This definition suggests that forgiveness has elements of attitudinal change, behavioural choice, and situates forgiveness in temporal relation to one’s past experience. While acceptable as a broad definition and intuitively appealing, Hope’s (1987) definition does not explicate the essential qualities nor process involved in the act of forgiveness.

Ausberger (1981) provides an equally broad definition, but situates forgiveness in temporal relevance as a human dimension of experience. Ausberger (1981, p.52) defines forgiveness as “a letting what was, be gone; what will be, come; what is now, be”. For Rowe et al (1989, p.242) the temporal aspect of forgiveness lies in the present as a moment of opening-up, and involves “a shift in one’s understanding of, and relationship to, the other person, oneself, and the world”.

From the above definitions three key dimensions of forgiveness become apparent. Firstly, the process of forgiveness encompasses one’s whole life as lived, bringing the past experience into present awareness while offering new ways of seeing the future. Secondly, the process is interpersonal in the sense that the shift in relationship to another occurs when the other and oneself are perceived differently. Thirdly, the act of forgiveness presupposes choice in the sense that the other is perceived differently in relation to oneself. Hope (1987, p.240) summarises the set of choices as either to seek revenge (and thus to feel resentment), or to practise an attitude of forgiveness (and hence to assume a sense of freedom). However, Rowe (et al, 1989, p.241) note that the awareness of choice precedes resolution, in that “forgiveness appears to come to us in an unexpected context, often at an unexpected moment ... yet it becomes apparent that, at some level, it was sought, as one was willing to forgive and be open to the possibility of resolution”. In this sense, choice translates into willingness, and forgiveness occurs when the appropriate context for its interpersonal expression arises.

From the above discussion, two reasons emerge for the possible neglect of the process of forgiveness in psychology. In the first instance, forgiveness refers to a transcendent process that is interpersonal. Hence it requires an appropriate method for studying human lived experience, rather than a quantitatively driven methodology appropriate for measurement of behaviour change.

Secondly, the concept of forgiveness is a central notion of religious philosophy and spiritual healing. Psychology as a science is not taken with the notion nor realm of

the spirit, while religion takes credence in this domain. Friedlander (1986) notes that forgiveness is central to both Jewish and Christian religions. In his discussion of the similarities and differences between Judaism and Christianity he notes that forgiveness is related to, and has important consequences for each religion's position on the nature of humanity, which in turn is a defining difference between them. Friedlander (1986, p.7) states that Judaism is opposed to original sin, and places emphasis on forgiveness through confession, repentance and atonement. In contrast Patton (1987, p.119) states that "forgiving is a personal attitude". For Patton (1987) forgiveness in the Christian sense is made possible through Christ who has acted on man's behalf and made atonement for man. In the Jewish use of forgiveness, reconciliation with God occurs through the actions of atonement undertaken by the sinner. In the Christian sense of the word, reconciliation with God occurs through the change of attitude of the sinner and his/her acceptance of Jesus as the facilitator of the forgiving process. The similarities and contrasts are clear; in the former case forgiveness is a spiritual requirement of healing and is the process that allows for reconciliation to take place. However, in the Jewish understanding of the term, forgiveness is made possible by the actions of confession and atonement and results in reconciliation. In the Christian notion, it is the change of attitude that is central to an interpersonal process of reconciliation.

It may be concluded that while psychology has a deep awareness of the value of forgiveness, it has little understanding of the human experience of the forgiveness process. Hence Rowe et al, (1989) and Halling (1994) call for further studies to broaden psychology's understanding of the contexts of forgiveness beyond the domains of the personal relationship, and that of self-forgiveness, which they have studied respectively.

### **3.2.2 The value of forgiveness**

While psychological literature makes reference to forgiveness in its key role in the process of healing, not only does the literature reveal a lack of empirical research and theoretical conceptualisation, but the value of forgiveness has also tended to remain

neglected in terms of philosophical discourse. Notable exceptions include the essays of Kaufman (1984), North (1987), Holmgren (1993), Halling (1994, 1996) and Baures (1996).

Kaufman (1984) has described forgiveness in its relationship to courage, and places the value of forgiveness as a process of growth towards adult responsibility. Kaufman (1984, p.178) defines forgiveness as an effort to “give up, to cease to harbour resentment, to pardon an offence”, which in turn requires the courage to face one’s human mortality. An existential awareness of the temporal categories of past, present and future confronts man with the choice to let go of past loss, and in so doing not waste further present nor limited future time by being encaptured by the past. Kaufman (1984, p.187) writes that in this respect the value of the process of forgiveness is that it requires courage, when he states that “to forgive is courage in the face of an ongoing process, a progression toward growth and adult responsibility”.

Baures (1996) approaches the value of forgiveness indirectly from a courageous point of view, but also identifies the central significance of the transformative potential of forgiveness when the victim is able to let go of bitterness. In her study of survivors of Vietnam war experiences Baures (1996, p.75) concludes that “all who made positive transformations in the wake of trauma, found a way to let go of bitterness.” This strength to place the trauma in its past temporal significance, came either through a recognition of the need to move on as a future growth requirement, or through transforming themselves by finding new priorities and values.

For North (1987) the value of forgiveness also lies in its transformational potential. North (1987, p.499) argues that “forgiveness typically involves an effort on the part of the one wronged: a conscious attempt to improve oneself in relation to the wrongdoer”. The courageous quality of forgiveness is implied in North’s (1987, p.507) statement that “the forgiving character is one which is achievable only after a hard-fought battle”. In this sense, forgiveness is valuable because it requires a

“moral vision” of the inherent value of humanity, and calls forth a position of “moral superiority” on the part of the victim (North, 1987, p.507).

Holmgren (1993) identifies the value of forgiveness through a philosophical examination of the process that the victim must work through. In order to forgive, there must have been an injured person who is then properly situated to forgive. Holmgren (1993, p.341) points out that in order to forgive one must overcome the negative responses one feels towards the perpetrator. These feelings are important to acknowledge since they are fundamental to the victim’s rebuilding of self-esteem. Honouring these negative feelings is also important to enable the victim to separate the act from the actor. In this respect Holmgren (1993) points out that genuine forgiveness is of the person, and does not involve condoning of the act. Hence inappropriate forgiveness would involve attempts by the victim to forgive the oppressor as a moral requirement, without working through the feelings and implications of forgiveness and non-forgiveness in their entirety. In this respect Holmgren (1993) is in agreement with the previous authors on the intrinsic value of forgiveness as a courageous and transformative growth process.

Both Rowe et al (1994), and Halling (1994, 1996) have identified the common themes of the temporal shift and the transformative nature of the forgiving process but place these in an interpersonal context. Their empirical-phenomenological research will be described in more detail in the following section dealing with the nature of forgiveness as a human experience.

### **3.2.3 The experience of forgiving**

Three studies of the phenomenology of the experience of forgiving another and oneself will be reviewed in terms of their common themes and different perspectives. The study by Rowe et al (1989) has been referred to in its attempt to identify common themes in the experience of forgiving another in the context of a personal relationship. Halling (1994) explores the relationship between forgiving another and forgiving oneself, and concludes that the process involves a movement into a deeper

connection with others, and a deeper insight into one's own life. Fow (1996) identifies three specific themes in his empirical-phenomenological research into the experience of forgiving another, of which the theme termed "transformation of meaning" most closely approximates the transformational quality of forgiveness identified in the other two studies.

All three studies follow a process structure in their descriptive explications, beginning with the circumstances that lead to a need for forgiveness. Rowe et al, (1989) state that the process is interpersonal, beginning when one experiences hurt in relation to another. The injury results in a loss of identify of the self in relation to others, and a possible future role. Halling (1994) described this loss in terms of the experience of shame that the victim feels in relation to others, and as a sense of personal inadequacy after the violation. Halling (1994) suggests that the desire for self-forgiveness originates when one experiences a sense of guilt for damaging a relationship that is valued. Fow (1996, p.222) describes his initial stage of movement towards forgiving another as beginning with "a reconsideration of one's part in or response to the violation" and notes that this reconsideration is "always of and about an interpersonal association of some sort".

The affective components of the forgiveness experience identified by Rowe et al (1989) include; a remembering of the loss as a painful experience; a sense of hurt that is accompanied by feelings of anger and a desire for revenge; a feeling of grief as the loss is considered in its deeper life significance; and a desire for reconciliation if the relationship was previously experienced as valuable. Halling (1994) does not describe the experience of forgiving in the affective mode, but focuses on the meaning of shame and guilt in their existential life contexts. Halling (1994) describes forgiveness as an experience of compassion when the victim develops a sense of commonality with the other as a fallible human being struggling with the same life concerns. Halling (1994, p.109) notes that compassion requires a sense that the other in perpetrating the act is shamed, as much as the victim feels ashamed of the violation as a loss of self and world relationships. Put another way the expression of

compassion is directed towards another, hence it establishes a sense of connectedness in human existence, but arises out of separate places of loss or fallibility. Fow (1996) describes his second stage of “transformation of meaning”, as one in which the victim makes new meaning from the past by appreciating the other’s motives for acting, which in turn could depersonalise the violation. Fow (1996), apart from this general statement of cognitive transformation and its interpersonal context, does not offer clarification of the processes by which this occurs, nor the affective states involved.

Fow’s (1996) third stage of reconciliation, is also described as a possible positive outcome of the phenomenon of forgiving by Rowe et al (1989), and as a result of the taking of responsibility by Halling (1994). For Rowe et al (1994) forgiveness arises as an unexpected moment in which the victim experiences this shift in understanding of, and relationship to the other, and in so doing opens up new possibilities for a positive future that hitherto remained blocked. Halling (1994) characterises this transformative movement as an openness to new future possibilities by letting go of the expectations of the other, and concurrently a taking of responsibility in one’s own hands for one’s future. Fow (1996) describes his stage of reconciliation by direct reference to Rowe’s et al (1989, p.239) definition of the term as ending in a psychological coming together of the two parties. Halling (1994) adds that this reconciliation implies an acceptance of the fallibility of the other, and thus an acceptance of the fallibility of oneself, beyond which one may still aspire to arise as a growth possibility.

#### **3.2.4 Forgiveness in the therapeutic process**

The studies of Rowe et al (1989), Halling (1994) and Fow (1996) have identified a central theme of the transformative potential of forgiveness. This growth possibility, and the inter-personal context of the process of forgiveness, leads to a consideration of the role of forgiveness in the healing endeavour of psychotherapy.

Kaufman (1984), Holmgren (1993) and Baures (1996) have described the importance of a genuine experiencing of and working through of the cognitive and affective

dimensions involved, before attempting reconciliation as a morally or religiously desirable outcome. Hence phenomenology has made an important contribution to the therapist's healing endeavour. Previous sections have described forgiveness as an essentially inter-personal process that requires insight through effort, and an assuming of personal responsibility on the part of the victim, that has a transformative and thus growth oriented opportunity. Techniques to induce forgiveness, or the placing of a moral requirement on the victim to forgive, are likely to repress deeply held feelings of hurt and have negative outcomes if used in the therapeutic endeavour.

A review of the literature identifying the role of forgiveness in the counselling or psychotherapy process, as has been noted reveals a paucity of studies. However, four articles have been identified since 1980, which refer to forgiveness in this context, those of Fitzgibbons (1986); Worthington and Diblasio (1990); McCullough and Worthington (1994); and Enright (1996).

Early clinical models seeking to explain the process of forgiveness centered on the role of anger and its expression as a technique aiding forgiveness. Fitzgibbons (1986) used a psychodynamic approach to explain the process of forgiveness, in terms of the types of defenses patients typically employ to resist the therapist's attempts to facilitate the expression of anger. The initial stage of forgiveness is characterised as one in which the patient's anger is transferred onto the therapist as a defense against facing the inflicted pain. In the next stage resistance occurs when patients displace early parent-based anger onto significant others in their adult relationships. The third stage of resistance is heralded by the surfacing of guilt when anger is expressed towards loved ones who have nurtured them.

Efforts to develop a therapeutic model of the process of forgiveness from an interpersonal perspective relate back to the efforts of Worthington and Diblasio (1990), and McCullough and Worthington (1994). In the former case the emphasis on mending of the fractured relationship, moves from the site of the injured party to

focus on the promotion of mutual forgiveness through the efforts of both parties. The emphasis is on the taking of responsibility by both parties for their respective hurtful actions, which along with atonement and sacrifice, are identified as key components of the forgiveness process.

McCullough and Worthington (1994) in their review of existing models of interpersonal forgiveness, distinguish four categories; models based on psychoanalytic or psychodynamic theories; those describing the tasks involved in the process of forgiveness; descriptions of the moral framework; and phenomena associated with forgiveness. McCullough and Worthington (1994, p.11) conclude that “most models of forgiveness are of limited clinical utility” since “theorising about forgiveness, like the empirical research on forgiveness, is in an early phase of scientific and applied sophistication”. The models of forgiveness presented above do not make any reference to phenomenologically based thought or research. The above author’s comment on the lack of utility of the reviewed clinically inspired models, may have more to do with the inappropriateness of the scientific methodology for the study of human experience of forgiveness, than lack of applied sophistication.

One notable exception to the present lack of usefulness in applied therapy of current theoretical models of forgiveness, is the work of Enright (1994). Enright’s (1994) study of forgiveness in the counselling process places the phenomenon within the three-way context of forgiving another, receiving forgiveness, and self-forgiveness. Enright (1994) bases his understanding of forgiveness on the philosophical arguments of North (1987) and Holmgren (1993) (section 3.2.2), and thus has a more deeply rooted understanding of the phenomenon in its situated context of the nature of human experience and the existential life position. Unfortunately, Enright (1994) slips into a classification of the stages of the three types of forgiveness, losing the descriptive richness of the human experience from the point of view of the therapist seeking to facilitate healing. Despite Enright’s (1994) reliance on a step format model to explicate the counselling process, his work does draw attention to key

themes that are universal to the forgiveness experience and which were identified in other phenomenologically inspired research (Rowe, et al., 1989; Halling, 1994; and Fow, 1996). These include the possibilities for self-insight and growth through an associated impetus towards fuller responsibility for one's role and life-potential; identification of the three-way process of forgiveness of the other, receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness; and the paradoxical nature of forgiveness as a "letting go" of the self as reference of the site of hurt while simultaneously receiving healing from the effects of the offense (Enright, 1996, p.111).

## CHAPTER 4

### Research Design and Data Generation

#### 4.1 The Guiding Questions

The purpose of this research study was to make a beginning attempt to understand the phenomenon of the TRC in the South African life-world. This study's research question is thus concerned with the meaning of giving testimony, and has interviewed the victims who spoke at the KwaZulu-Natal regional hearings.

The themes that arise in response to this guiding question and which have been asked in interviews of the victims concern the experience of giving testimony and being heard publicly in a legal forum presided over by significant persons of legal and political standing.

The fundamental guiding question is posed thus by asking: "What is the experienced meaning of testifying at the TRC for victims who spoke at the KwaZulu-Natal regional hearings?"

A related theme that arises in relation to the broad question would be to ask "Does healing unfold in the context of the public telling of one's story?" This question relates to the legal Act of Reconciliation and an underlining directive to constitute the TRC and thereby promote reconciliation at all levels in South Africa.

Thematising from the broad research question leads further to the notion of contextual truth, by asking "How does the process of public testimony become validated by the presence of a significant other or others who hear the story into being".

#### 4.2 Research Method

This research study marks a beginning in the attempt to understand the phenomenon of the TRC in the South African life-world, hence the guiding question was chosen

with this “opening up” objective in mind. Smaling (1992) notes that the influence of the research question on choosing a research method is generally accepted. However he adds that “since the research question does not necessarily and exclusively represent one particular paradigm, pragmatics enter into it” (Smaling, 1992, p.12). The pragmatic aspect of the guiding question refers to this research study as an initial phase of the quest to understand the phenomenon of the TRC . Secondly, this research study is an independent effort and hence did not have access to TRC reports nor participants on a national basis, while the TRC itself centralised research in its Cape Town office. Hence the quantitative questions concerning degrees of occurrence of outcomes of the TRC, and causal factors associated therewith may be better investigated by TRC researchers, once this research study has qualitatively identified the general meaning for participants of speaking at the TRC, and the essential themes that are common to their experience.

Thirdly, the literature review (Chapter 3) indicated that Rowe et al (1989) and Fow (1996) have conducted empirical phenomenological research into the essential meaning of forgiveness in the context of a personal relationship, while Halling (1994) has extended this method to enquire into the phenomenology of self-forgiveness. Hence it is appropriate to extend this research base to include forgiveness in the public context of speaking at the TRC.

As a first enquiry this study’s “opening up” of a deeper understanding was addressed by the following guiding research question:

- “What is the experienced meaning of speaking at the TRC for victims?”

The interview as method was chosen for this research study specifically because of its openness in providing a pathway to answering the above guiding question.

The purpose of the interviews was to allow space for the subjects to access and describe their experiences, and within the process of dialogue with the researcher to allow for the essential meanings to be revealed. Kvale (1996, p.97) describes the

exploratory interview as necessarily open, and with little structure but following two basic steps:

- The interviewer introduces an issue or area to be chartered.
- The interviewer follows up on the subjects' responses and seeks new information about, and new angles on the topic.

In order to keep the topic as open as possible, and to allow for dialogue about emerging themes, the subjects were introduced to the aim of the research, and then asked to describe their experience of speaking at the TRC according to three broad questions:

- What was your life like before you spoke at the TRC?
- What was it like to speak at the TRC?
- What is your life like now that you have spoken at the TRC?

The above questions were formulated to access the themes pertaining to the experience, and also to explicate or reveal the subjects' shift in perceptual life – experience, thereby revealing a lived aspect to the meaning of speaking at the TRC.

Written transcripts of the audio-recordings of the interviews were sent to literate participants, or discussed with non-literate participants to verify the statements made. While the possibility of adding further descriptions of the experience of giving testimony at the TRC was afforded to the subjects, none chose to add further responses. Fischer and Wertz (1979) state that this use of subjects to validate their own statements was an important step in ensuring the accuracy of the data gathering process.

A final issue to be discussed concerns the expertise, craft and flexibility of the interviewer in a phenomenological oriented interview process. Kvale (1996, p.103) notes that “good interviews require expertise in both subject matter and human interaction”. This implies that the research interview places the expertise of the researcher above the methodological control of structure for validity. Since the

interviewer becomes the instrument (Kvale, 1996, p.105), the outcome of an interview as a rich source of enlightened information, depends on the knowledge, sensitivity and freedom to respond of the researcher.

However, an emphasis on the role of the researcher as a participant in the dialogue of the interview process does not mean that rigour and thus accuracy, is sacrificed. In the interview as research method the researcher, by bracketing his assumptions and attending to that which is emerging between the researcher and subject, allows for more than just answers to emerge. In the second instance the differing cultural backgrounds of the researcher and the majority of the participants (albeit from a common life-world and history of experience) is specifically held in attendance as a further possibility for the emergence of deeper meaning, or shared “truth” as this reflects the social context of South African society (Halling, 1996). The attendant question held by the researcher is thus:

- How does my common life – experience, albeit from a different cultural position, in the socio-historical context of the events heard by the TRC, reveal further experience and make meaning of the phenomenon of speaking at the TRC?

Finally, as a practising psychotherapist of 10 years experience in the cross-cultural life-world of the phenomenon of the TRC, the researcher brings an intuitive level to the understanding of the phenomenon in question. Kvale (1996, p.106) describes this novice to expert model of learning skills by stating that “the expert ‘sees’ or ‘feels’ solutions by relying on an intuitive knowledge generalised from extensive case experience”.

### **4.3 The Selection of Subjects**

Polkinghorne (1992) suggests two broad requirements for the selection of subjects for an interview method of research study. The first requirement is that the subject has had the experience that is the topic of the research. In this case the criteria was specifically that subjects had testified as victims at the TRC hearings. A second

requirement was that “a subject has the capacity to provide full and sensitive descriptions of the experience under investigation” (Polkinghorne, 1992, p.47).

In the former case of the first requirement, it is worthwhile to note that this study experienced fieldwork difficulties similar, in many respects, to those encountered by Fischer and Wertz (1979) in their investigation of the experience of being criminally victimised. Just as Fischer and Wertz (1979) had difficulty with resistant police departments, so too did this research study face the resistance of the TRC with regard to access to subjects. An official letter stating the independent and scholarly nature of this research for doctoral purposes was rejected by the TRC, who indicated that their research team were the official persons involved in research which was centralised in Cape Town. Without access to the victims through the formal channels of the TRC, this research study relied on newspaper reports, and a township social worker, to identify subjects in the KwaZulu-Natal region. Thereafter letters explaining the purpose of the research and requesting permission for a confidential interview, were sent to as many subjects as could be located within the time constraints of the research study itself.

The second requirement referred to by Polkinghorne (1992), that of the subjects’ ability to provide a rich and full description of the phenomenon, was approached through an initial analysis of the literacy of the respondent’s reply letter (in the case of White and Indian subjects). The assistance of the social worker was used to request verbally permission from the majority of the subjects who were black female mothers/wives of activists either tortured or killed in the struggle. In the latter case, Polkinghorne (1992, p.48), warns of the danger of “choosing subjects that produce a narrow range of descriptions”. In this research study of the experience of speaking at the TRC, both male and female subjects were interviewed from the three cultural groups who spoke at the regional hearings of the KwaZulu-Natal TRC. Furthermore, since the majority of the victims were black mothers/wives of activists tortured, and/or killed, the researcher chose a predominant number of the subjects, who were black female victims who had spoken at the TRC, but also included black males, and

male and female subjects from other cultural groups, provided they had spoken at the TRC.

In this research study eight black female subjects, two black males, one Indian male, and one white female were interviewed. In this sense the researcher tried to choose a range of representative individuals who could provide as broad a variety of descriptions of the experience of speaking at the TRC as possible. Kvale (1996, p.101) in answer to the question of the number of subjects required for qualitative studies answers thus “interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know”. The pragmatic solution offered by Kvale (1996) was followed in this research study to the extent that subjects were interviewed until no further new themes, or new insights were revealed about the experience of speaking at the TRC. For example, Kvale (1996, p.94) in his study of the influence of grades on learning, included 30 pupils, but later concluded that “in retrospect, the interview study of grades would probably have yielded more valuable knowledge with fewer but longer, more intensive interviews”.

The number of subjects in this study numbered 12 in total, which it may be argued allowed for sufficient generalisability to the population of victims who spoke at the TRC for two reasons.

In the first instance, Polkinghorne (1992, p.48) argues that the issue of generalisability of qualitative interview findings “is not one of population characteristics, but of the specifying of the essential question”. In this respect the question of generalisability of the experience of speaking at the TRC is whether the essential structure developed and articulated in this research report, and the constituent themes, would be true for all other situations of speaking at public truth hearings into past state atrocities. In this case only victims, and not perpetrators of atrocities, were interviewed because of the issues of indemnity and amnesty which have multiple implications, and may thus be considered as confounding factors. The latter sub-category of subjects who spoke at the TRC will be left to other studies, but

the results of this research study clearly may not be generalised to include perpetrators. Smaling (1993) thus argues that in dialogical openness, the pragmatic dimension is one of consideration of the choice of subjects both for generalisability, and in terms of the closeness that each decision makes. In selecting only victims, the pragmatics of the decision concerned both access to subjects, and the closure that this constituted. In the first year of the TRC, the regional hearings of KwaZulu-Natal were concerned with hearing the testimony of victims. In the second year, issues of indemnity and amnesty arose when perpetrators applied for amnesty. Hence the time constraints of this research study and the effects of amnesty applications and the presence of lawyers acting for the perpetrators made the question of including only victims a pragmatic and a paradigmatic one respectively.

#### **4.4 Data Collection**

Once the names and addresses of victims who had spoken at the KwaZulu-Natal hearings of the TRC had been gathered, letters were sent to each person. The standard letter informed them of the independent nature of the research, its objectives and requested their voluntary participation. Of the six white and Indian participants thus circulated, only two returned the reply slip agreeing to the research interview. Two of the above group refused to participate, and the remaining two letters were returned as “address unknown”. A resident social worker in the Clairmont area was contacted to assist with the translation of the letters sent to the black participants. The social worker had personal relationships with 5 of the above participants, and knew of the remaining 6 black participants who he contacted telephonically as a follow-up to the letters. Not one of the reply slips was returned in the affirmative from the black participants. Hence the social worker then began contacting them to explain the research objectives and procedure directly. As participants agreed to be interviewed so the process of interviewing continued until no further new themes nor insights were gained (section 4.3). At this stage the total number of black participants now numbered 10 of which 2 were male.

The interview process involved the following stages:

- Verbal introductions and then explanation of the objectives of the research previously communicated in the letter of request;
- Request to describe his/her subjective experience of speaking at the TRC;
- Request to relate how this speaking at the TRC had changed the subjects' experienced life-world, by describing the subjects' life before, and then after the TRC.

The interviews were conducted between 9-18 months after the TRC hearings. The time span involved reflects the practical difficulties of contacting and communicating with subjects, as well as by design. In the latter case, it was felt that interviewing subjects soon after they had spoken would elicit feelings still raw, the meaning of which for the participant's life and future could not yet have been fully constituted. Hence at least 7 months and not more than 18 months had lapsed prior to the research interviews being conducted.

The interviews were open-ended, such that participants were allowed to engage in reflection about their expressed meaning of the experience they described. The dialogue with the researcher not only in establishing rapport, but also in allowing for appropriate verbal and behaviour responses, was deemed fundamentally important i.e. the researcher became the instrument of the interview, while maintaining a rigorous enquiry into the subject matter – stories told by the victims (section 4.2).

An unanticipated trend was that all of the black participants, while acknowledging the importance of the role of the social worker in setting-up the interviews, sought private interviews with the white male researcher i.e. requested that the black male social worker leave once the formal introductions had been made.

The interviews were conducted either at the researcher's office or at the homes of the participants. While no other direct questions were asked, the researcher deemed it important from a dialogical point of reference to respond as a human being to the emotional meaning giving gestures and utterances of the participants. However, in



the main, the researcher's responses were restricted to requests for further clarification, or deeper description of each participant's experiences, rather than directing further areas for enquiry or information gathering. Only in one instance was the researcher moved to respond as a life-world participant from the past era of apartheid. The associated risk of responding personally was taken to be justified by the rich source of data that was gained by this experience (Chapter 6).

## CHAPTER 5

### Data Analysis and Results

#### 5.1 Method of Analysis

Fischer and Wertz (1979) argue that the point of research is the explicit formulation of generality. The method of data analysis used in this study will seek to provide a pathway to a deeper understanding of the common meaning for victims of their experience of testifying at the TRC. A phenomenologically informed method of analysis will be used since this study is concerned with a method to understand human experience, and not to measure manifest behaviour.

Giorgi (1983, p.147) identifies three valuable areas that this approach holds for psychology. In the first instance it provides an approach to psychology as a human science grounded in a deeper understanding of the nature of human consciousness. Secondly, it allows for the researcher to take his/her place as a participant in the process of research without sacrificing rigour and validity. And thirdly, it places description as a valid basis for qualitative analysis.

This chapter's method of data analysis to generate the above essential meanings of the phenomenon follows the general outlines articulated by Giorgi (1975), applied by Fischer and Wertz (1979) and further elaborated by Wertz (1983). The forms of results presented indicate the steps in this qualitative research process from the subject's immediate descriptions, to the formulation of the general psychological meaning of speaking at the TRC. Each step is illustrated with case material to indicate how the essential psychological constituents are arrived at. Finally, the necessary and sufficient conditions for the phenomenon to occur are concluded from the overall analysis of results as a systematic general description of the experienced meaning of speaking at the TRC.

The results are presented in the following order to represent the steps in the analysis and findings of each stage. The questions posed in each stage follow the format of Fischer and Wertz (1979, p.139) in their method of analysis of the experience of being criminally victimised.

### **5.1.1 Individual Case Description**

In the first step, the individual verbatim transcripts were analysed by temporally ordering the descriptive statements of the subjects' experience of speaking at the TRC. This allowed for the identification and logical clustering of the personally meaning aspects of the experience in chronological order. The subjects' own everyday language was used and irrelevant statements were excluded. This step corresponds to asking the question: "What are the essential components of the subjects' experience, and in what sequence did they occur?"

### **5.1.2 Illustrative Narratives**

In the second step a narrative was written for each chronologically ordered descriptive segment (above). The themes that occurred in the temporal order were linked in a narrative, and expressed in everyday language according to the implied meaning that the subject intended to convey in each unit of expression. This step corresponds to asking the question: "What is the personal meaning that the subject is seeking to express in their everyday language?"

### **5.1.3 Transformation into Psychological Meaning**

In the third step, a general condensation of the common meanings across the collated narratives was written in phenomenologically based psychological language. This step corresponds to asking the question: "What is essential to all of these personal meanings? How do they reveal the existential (including social) themes of the experience of testifying at the TRC?"

#### **5.1.4 General Psychological Structure**

In the fourth step (synthesis), the transcripts were re-written as a singular statement of the general psychological meaning of the experience of speaking at the TRC. The overall experience, its constituents, and necessary and sufficient conditions for the phenomenon to occur were integrated in psychological terms. This step corresponds to asking the question: “What is essential to the psychological experience of testifying as a victim at the TRC?”

### **5.2 Results**

The original verbatim audiotaped transcripts are presented in Appendix I. The transcripts were recorded in response to the overall guiding question: “Please describe what it meant to you to speak at the TRC – by referring to what your life was like before the TRC – what it was like to speak at the TRC – and how your life has changed since you spoke at the TRC.” Subjects varied in terms of their verbal fluency in English, as the majority of the participants were from a background of previous educational disadvantage and were conversing in English as a second language. Furthermore, two participants experienced secondary traumatising and were unable to continue, even though they were asked to recount their experiences of speaking at the TRC and not their original experiences of being victimised.

Of the 12 subjects interviews, two illustrative recorded interviews per se are reproduced in this section (5.2.1). These will illustrate each subject’s naïve experience of speaking at the TRC. The two transcripts are offered as negative and positive dialectic contrasts, to illustrate the potentially positive outcome of the truth being told and heard, and the possibility of healing through forgiveness when confessions and apologies are personally offered and accepted.

#### **5.2.1 Individual Case Descriptions**

The paragraphs represent the first step in dividing the subjects’ experience into meaningful aspects (themes) of the phenomenon under investigation. The subdivisions are implicit meaning aspects of the experience as they naturally occurred

in the recorded text. Fischer and Wertz (1979, p.140) term this step the “individual case synopses”, while Wertz (1983, p.199) later called this starting point “revelatory description” – “a single person’s expression of the matter we wish to study with all irrelevant statements excluded”. The procedure for this step follows the sequence used by Fischer and Wertz (1979, p.144), which they describe as a variation of Giorgi’s (1975) method of analysis, i.e. (a) familiarising the transcriptions by re-readings; (b) demarcating transcriptions into numbered units; and (c) casting these units into temporal order.

In response to the guiding question: “Please describe what it meant to you to speak at the TRC – by referring to what your life was like before the TRC – what it was like to speak at the TRC – and how your life has changed since you spoke at the TRC.”

**(a) Subject One: Mr Y.H.**

The subject was an Indian male in his mid-forties and was divorced. He was the brother of an ANC activist and medical doctor who was killed in police detention under unexplained circumstances.

1. “I have suffered for eighteen years since my brother’s death in detention. I suffered financial loss. Both my wife and I suffered depression. I was victimised by the security police.
2. My wife repeatedly attempted suicide over the years.
3. My life felt like a jigsaw, and I became obsessed with the great difficulty of fitting together the scraps of information about my brother’s death. Nobody knew anything about my brother’s activities, nor would the police explain how he died.
4. When the concept of the TRC was announced, I was not happy with its composition. The most important point that was missing was Justice. It should have been Truth, Justice and Reconciliation. Truth could have been left out because with justice, the truth would come out.
5. I debated for a long time with myself and decided to go to the TRC for the following reasons:

- (a) To record publicly what happened to my brother, because I believe that all atrocities should be recorded.
  - (b) To make it known to the TRC that all perpetrators should be arrested and brought to court.
  - (c) To make it known that no person/body has the right to pardon perpetrators. Only the victim can pardon, it is immoral if anyone else tries to do so.
6. I had hoped that my reasons for going would be fulfilled, but my misgivings proved right. My mother refused to go. She said that I should go and speak because if she spoke the hurt would come back.
  7. Preparing to go the TRC I grew a moustache like my brother's, and had spectacles made like his. When I looked in the mirror I didn't recognise myself.
  8. At the TRC I asked that they investigate my brother's unexplained death in detention. I explained that in 18 years we hadn't made any progress.
  9. There was no fear of being harassed and I spoke freely.
  10. But there was an element of sadness. After 18 years the trauma was brought to life and hurt me again. We relived 1977 (in a way). The reason it comes to life is because there are a lot of unknowns.
  11. After I had spoken at the TRC, I was approached by a security policeman who said he had been in contact with someone who was involved with my brother's death. I believe that this man, the Indian security policeman who he introduced me to, was trying to curry favour with me to show that they had reformed. They said that they were sorry about what had happened to my brother and blamed the apartheid system. While I accepted their offer to help and therefore their apologies, I felt angry because I felt that they had forgotten the relish that they took in carrying out their tasks.
  12. The Indian security policeman told me little more than I already knew. I passed on the information to the TRC, and they subpoenaed him to appear. He told them a little more detail. He wouldn't mention names, and would not implicate himself. He named a colonel as the assaulter of my brother. The

TRC subpoenaed the colonel, who denied everything. I left the TRC feeling unhappy because they had only subpoenaed the colonel, and not his superiors nor the other policeman I had named. My expectation that something new or dramatic would emerge from the TRC was not met. It was not enough for me that the perpetrators had stated that my brother was just beaten and died, as I was hoping that they would admit to dirty tricks.

13. There was hope that the TRC would find out the truth, but nothing emerged. They didn't try very hard, either. We still don't know how my brother died. The four hours are still missing, i.e. from midnight to 4.00 a.m. we do not know what happened. We can't prove a stitch as they deny it and say that they locked him up at midnight. They are safe in the four hours and 'they're basking in that safety'.
14. Some friends then phoned me and expressed the belief that since there was no publicity value, the TRC hadn't taken this issue of my brother's death in detention any further. The TRC didn't respond to my correspondence when I wrote to them to say that a friend of mine would like to come out from the USA to testify.
15. After speaking at the TRC I returned home and felt angry and became even more depressed. Had the truth come out and a confession, then the speaking would have brought us some comfort. Then we wanted justice. That funeral is not complete without the truth and justice. This unknown factor has plagued us for 21 years. It's like a coffin in the home that can't be buried. When the funeral is concluded, and the coffin buried then the process of healing can start. The process of healing has been retarded in my brother's case by the unknown.
16. After the TRC I took the scissors and cut off the moustache. The mistake I had made was it was not me. Now it was me. I told my wife: "We've got 19 years to catch up". She said: "You realised it 19 years too late".
17. A year later I phoned Dr M and she sent me to Townhill psychiatric hospital. This was too late and my wife left me. Since then she has been living with another person. It was an accumulation. If it was just my wife and me, we

could have coped. But it was the factory loss and we had lost a lot of my wife's money. I was not conscious of any marital discord. My wife gave me a lot of happiness – she supported me. How could I have got happiness if she wasn't happy?

18. She died in January 1998, shot in the head. The police are looking into it – I'm not convinced it was suicide. They suspect murder. The manner of her death disturbs me.
19. My life is now a big mess. The only difference in my life now is that I feel free to express my opinion as I did at the TRC."

**(b) Subject Eight: Ms T.M.**

The subject is a black female in her mid-fifties. She is the widow of an ANC community leader and business man assassinated by unknown gunmen in 1998.

1. "Before I went to speak at the TRC I had been in pain since the death of my husband. My husband used to help the old, poor and destitute. He buried the poor out of care. He was a good father and husband. Life was good. He had three businesses, two butcheries and a grocery shop.
2. I had questions about the death of my husband that I could not answer. He was sitting with my ten-year-old boy in the car. I was in the room upstairs when I heard loud bangs outside and went to the window and peeped out. I saw my son holding my husband and crying. I went down the stairs, out to the car where I heard my son saying: "Please dad, talk to me, I am your son". Across the road my daughter was standing still looking towards our house. I was told that she had been standing there for more than ten minutes, a fifteen-year-old girl had messed herself with urine and excretion and was looking dazed.
3. When my husband died I received threatening calls. My life went down the drain because of the threats I received. I abandoned all the businesses from fear of the unknown faces. I reported them to the police at K Police Station and to this day nothing has been done to bring the callers to book.

4. I went to the TRC to find out who killed my husband and why. My children also wanted to know.
5. But my son refused to go. The killing happened in 1988 but to this day my son has sleepless nights. He keeps awaking and wanting to run away from the killers. It is like he sees them coming. He said that if he saw them at the TRC he feared that he would try to kill them.
6. I had an expectation of justice being served at the TRC. I thought that the statement that I had made to the clerks would be considered and a ruling made.
7. I gave my statement on 9 May 1996, the same date my husband died. When it was my turn to speak I started recalling the day my husband was shot. I felt as if my wounds were starting to ooze again. The pain kept on and I fell to the floor. Nothing mattered and I cursed God for punishing me the way he did. Why me? I recall that I woke up and went back to talk. I told the TRC all that I knew. I felt some relief after speaking.
8. A car followed us after the TRC and we tried to escape. The commissioner travelled with us via a back route. We slept at the Pavilion Hotel that night to protect us. We were phoned and threatened with death. They even phoned a commissioner, Mrs G, who was threatened and she had to be protected, too.
9. We went back home. I disguised myself as a cleaner. I was accosted by hired killers. They put a gun to my head and I denied who I was. I fainted and my friends helped me. When I woke up I couldn't recognise my sister. I was dazed and disorientated as if I was in another world.
10. We were taken to Pretoria for protection. We stayed in a hotel for three months.
11. Then the Amnesty Hearings started. We saw our dear one's killers. They told the story of what they did and how they monitored the hit squads. When they told how they set up the killings we wept.
12. I now knew who had killed him and why. I was relieved when I learned who had killed my husband. Listening to the perpetrators and seeing them brought relief, at least I know some of the people who were involved in this. Only two

of them appeared before the Commission. I wanted to know where the others were.

13. After they gave their statements, the TRC started investigations into the accomplices in September 1997. To our surprise they were pardoned. I can't believe that a man confesses and they still acquit him. We expected justice. I am angry that they just pardoned them. The prosecutor hung his head. I went to the prosecutor and said: "Don't worry, they will hang in heaven."
14. I want to appeal to the Minister of Justice. After all the threats we had suffered from them it is unfair that they were then acquitted. Our lawyer blamed us for not laying a charge against him in the Supreme Court.
15. The commander of the hit squad came to us at the TRC Amnesty Hearing and shook our hands and asked for forgiveness. Since they personally asked us for forgiveness, I said I forgive them as long as they acknowledge the truth. If the people ask you, you have to forgive. Only you can forgive, the courts can't forgive. They must still ask for forgiveness from God.
16. Since I'd forgiven when they asked, I am relieved. I now have peace in my heart. I can walk free, and he is now free to walk. We haven't been threatened since the Amnesty Hearing at the Christian Centre in Durban in August 1998.
17. This is the good work that the TRC has provided. To enable us to talk about the pain. After all this, at least the truth has come out. No matter what state you are in, at least it is better to know before you die.
18. I feel that the TRC has been good and bad. I am not completely healed, since the remaining members were not brought to tell the truth. I need to know them all. I need to see their faces, so that I can know, and tell my children who the killers are, and why they killed my husband.
19. One of the bad things is that they have now neglected us. The TRC is not following up with those of us who have testified before it, to check how we are keeping and coping with life after having said it all. I feel that the healing is not happening.

20. We filled in separate forms to claim. We still haven't received any reparation.
21. The psychologist we consulted could not help, because there are so many people who have testified before the TRC, that we had to wait all day at the hospital. This hurts a lot, and we have given up going. It would have been better if they did not even start the counselling process because I feel very hurt as of now.
22. My son of eleven years still has a hand-washing compulsion. He washes as if he has the blood of his father. The wounds are not healing. The feeling of emptiness in me makes me sad. When I think of a solution I cannot get any help.
23. I am tired now. May I give you a copy of the statement I made to the TRC for you to continue with your research? Your interview has made me feel good because I trust you are understanding me. Please go now and speak to others like me. God be with you."

### **5.2.2 Illustrated Narratives**

In this step the temporally ordered descriptive statements are re-written in a narrative format, by paraphrasing the subject's words. The narratives are an attempt to describe more clearly in everyday language what the subject is really trying to express in terms of his/her personal experience of testifying at the TRC. Fischer and Wertz (1979, p.147) call these paragraphs the "illustrated narratives" which seek to provide "temporally ordered summaries of the experience, while still retaining the concrete particulars for the subject".

#### **Subject One: Mr Y.H.**

1. The first descriptive statement expresses the subject's experience of suffering since his brother's death in detention. The experience of suffering is situated in many different contexts including his personal relationship with his wife, his business decline and his experience of victimisation by the security police.

2. His suffering is expressed as a sense of depression affecting both himself and his wife, and finding expression in her attempts of suicide.
3. The subject's suffering is manifest as a motivational power towards the quest for closure.
4. The second dominant theme is the motivation for closure. The subject places the outcome of justice as the even signalling closure, which will require that the truth will be revealed. The relationship between truth and justice is drawn out more clearly where justice as an outcome that signals closure, subsumes and requires expression of the truth.
5. The subject took a long time to consider participation and to arrive at a decision. The reasons for going further reveal the subject's overriding quest for justice through the arrest and sentencing of the perpetrators. The length of time taken to reach a decision reveals the apprehension of the subject in relation to his fear that justice may not be served. In this meaning unit the fear of unfulfilled expectation is linked to the wish to prevent the perpetrators from being pardoned. A view of forgiveness is expressed in the subject's statement that only the victim can pardon. This implies that forgiveness is an individual process between victim and perpetrator and not a collective outcome based on another's position e.g. legal.
6. A further cause of the subject's anxiety about testifying at the TRC, is revealed as an anticipatory anxiety that the original trauma would arise again in the telling of the story.
7. The subject's identification with the victim is indicated by his attempt to appear like his brother through the moustache and having spectacles made. In so doing the subject attempts to keep the memory of his brother alive, through making his brother's presence visible in his own bodily appearance.
8. By asking the TRC to investigate the nature of his brother's death, the subject seeks to validate more fully his brother's genuine existence.
9. The subject experiences a meaningful place to testify, which requires a freedom from fear of victimisation. The public nature of his testimony enables this freedom of speech, as any attempt to restrict his speaking would

- be witnessed publicly and indicate that what he had to say must therefore contain an element of truth.
10. The act of testifying brings the original trauma and its emotions back into full consciousness. The element of sadness is a reflective perspective on the lived potential that has been lost over time. The unknown cause and circumstances of the death has prevented a sense of closure. This sense of loss of lived potential endures in the people who remember what could have been expressed in their respective interpersonal relationships.
  11. The subject, in hearing the apologies of the accomplices, feels forced to accept the apologies, as he experiences the sense of truth in the remorse that the perpetrators express as they offer the apologies. However, the subject simultaneously experiences anger that in hearing the apologies, he is thus bound to accept them, although he suspects that the original acts were carried out in a manner of perverse enjoyment.
  12. The perpetrators subpoenaed by the TRC do not tell the whole story. Hence, for the truth to emerge, the perpetrator as a witness must engage fully with the audience to allow for a complete dialogue to take place.
  13. The act of denial provides a space of safety for the perpetrator, but prevents closure on the part of the victim.
  14. The lack of closure compels the subject to continue to correspond with the TRC. In this sense the lack of truth is reflected in the lack of ending of a personal story that validates one's life.
  15. The subject states that the lack of truth is experienced like a funeral that is incomplete. The subject describes this lack of closure by reference to the analogy of a coffin remaining in the house awaiting the body of knowledge to fill the space that its presence opens up. In this sense healing as a letting go of the dead, requires a full and public statement of the event in question which can then be validated as the truth.
  16. The subject's act of cutting off of the moustache he grew to resemble his brother is likened to a regaining of his own self. The price that the subject has paid for not living his own life, is reflected in the lost opportunities that

his wife states are lost forever. The details of his brother's unexplained death thus form the drama around which his own life had been arrested. His story at the TRC is of his own life and its truncated nature, as he has continued to live in the shadow of his brother before and after the events in detention.

17. The subject's recapturing of his own life after the TRC, is also a revealing of his inadequacy in not living to his full potential for nineteen years. The effect of this lost potential is interpersonal to the extent that his wife now fully comprehends the lack of a fulfilling relationship. His wife chooses this revealing moment to leave him.
18. The subject experiences his wife's death as disturbing in the sense that her apparent suicide leaves unanswered questions. There is a parallel with his brother's death in that they both died in the company of strangers to him and his immediate family. Hence the manner of their deaths remains unwitnessed by persons meaningful to him, thus precluding a closure to their life stories.
19. The subject ends the interview by reflecting on his life story and describes it as a "big mess". His investment of his own life meaning into that of validating his brother's life by seeking to reveal the way in which he died, has subjugated his other life potentials. In essence, he reveals that he has lived his life through the meaning it has in relation to a dead relative, and not on account of his own existence. However, he does experience a freedom of expression, but experiences this paradoxically still in relation to a lost other, and not as an ability to express his own life potential. Without the revealing of the truth through the testimony of a witness to his brother's death, his own freedom of expression cannot bring meaningful closure, and allow him to live his own life.

**(b) Subject Eight: Ms T.M.**

1. In the first paragraph, the subject reflects that her life since the death of her husband has been one of pain which clouds her overall life orientation. This ongoing sense of painful affect is as a consequence of the death of her husband.

2. The theme from the second paragraph is one of concern with unanswered questions. The events and cause of her husband's death are not able to be meaningfully constituted, leaving her with a sense of a void in her life.
3. The traumatic experience of the loss of her husband is compounded by fear for her own life, and those of her children. The death threats are described as coming from "unknown faces", reinforcing the theme of a life void identified above.
4. The subject is motivated to speak at the TRC by the need to throw light upon this unknown space in her life. To know who killed her husband and why, reflects a need to make meaning of his death in her life.
5. The inability of her son to sleep since the traumatic events of his father's death, indicates the long term nature of post traumatic stress disorder. The symptoms include sleep dysfunction, anxiety and depression.
6. The subject describes herself as motivated by an expectation of justice from the TRC, placing the TRC in her perception as an omnipotent legal forum. An expectation of a ruling implies that the subject had a need or expectation of closure, which she hoped for in the form of judgement from the TRC.
7. The subject's experience of the act of speaking is cathartic in the sense that "my wounds were starting to ooze again". While the subject stated that she felt some relief after speaking, the magnitude of the pain of the original trauma is re-experienced. The description is of a loss of consciousness as the subjective experience is one of returning to the past trauma. The subject feels as if she is no longer in the present, and falls out of this current place in time. The painful loss is too much to experience in the present, hence the loss of consciousness as a retreat to another worldly existence.
8. For the subject the consequences of public telling of a "truth" is a threat of death. The relevance of the information spoken in public weighs heavily upon the subject as it affects their relationship with other known or unknown figures in their life-world.
9. The threat of loss of life is made real when the subject is accosted by hired killers. The trauma of impending loss of her own life precipitates another

loss of consciousness. The subjective experience is described similar to how she felt when she fainted at the TRC. She describes this sense of disorientation as “if I was in another world”.

10. The subject is then taken to another part of the world, in the sense that she thereafter lived in a hotel in Pretoria for three months under police protection.
11. The confessions of the assassins at the Amnesty Hearings is an experience of great sadness.
12. The confessions also allow for a sense of relief as the faces and names bring about a certainty, and herald pending closure in the subject’s quest for the “truth” to come out.
13. The granting of amnesty to the assassins is a surprise to the subject who had expected a sentencing to be the result of her testimony and the confession. The unfulfilled expectation leads to feelings of anger, and a desire for revenge by another omnipotent figure – this time as divine justice by God.
14. Confession leading to forgiveness is an unexpected concept, that is difficult for the subject to comprehend. Hence blame is directed at other figures by and including the lawyers representing the victims.
15. The direct request by the assassin to the victim at the Amnesty Hearing indicates that forgiveness is an interpersonal act, made meaningful and requiring both a perpetrator’s confession and a victim’s acceptance of the truth of the confession.
16. The subject’s statement that “only you can forgive, the courts can’t forgive” draws a distinction between the moral act of forgiveness by the victim, and the institutional judgement leading to an outcome for the perpetrator. The victim, by forgiving the perpetrator, releases the perpetrator of the moral debt owed to the victim. However, the perpetrator is pardoned by the institution of the consequence of the actions as a debt owed to society.
17. The TRC is described in terms of the positive and negative consequences for the subject. As a properly constituted public forum presided over by significant figures of spiritual and legal standing the testimony of participants is accorded the status of recorded truth. The subject states that “it is better to

- know before you die” implying that “knowing the truth” is to be more fully alive. The link between “knowing” and “living” is drawn out in this unit.
18. In this respect, not knowing is a form of living death, in comparison with the “knowing” is “living” as an enlightened metaphor that was drawn (meaning unit 17 above).
  19. A negative consequence of the TRC is described in terms of the lack of follow-up, and fear of the death threats as a result of testimony given. Fear prevents healing. This fear is the result of anonymous death threats.
  20. Another negative consequence of the TRC is the sense of unfulfilled expectation of reparations.
  21. The lack of sufficient counselling resources is also described as an unfulfilled expectation, which then acts to compound the trauma.
  22. The mental health consequences of the violations are described as ongoing in the face of lack of treatment. The patient implies that when she now recognises the provision of therapy as a solution to the long term neurosis, she feels sad because she cannot get any help.
  23. The subject concludes with a statement that the research interview has had therapeutic consequences. The space provided, and experience of being understood has helped the subject to feel better – an outcome that she relates to as a deep need on the part of other victims in a similar position after testifying at the TRC.

### **5.2.3 Transformation into psychological meaning**

The central theme of each of the above illustrative narratives was reflected upon and transformed into a psychological statement. The psychological statements each seek to express accurately and concisely the subject’s intended meaning. Repetitive and non-revelatory themes (unrelated to the experience of testifying at the TRC) were discarded in this stage.

Polkinghorne (1992, p.55) notes that this transformation into psychological description is one of the most difficult aspects of the data-analysis, because of “the

lack of language appropriate to a phenomenological based psychology”. In essence, rigour needs to be maintained by being faithful to the experience in its situated context, while allowing for the researcher’s intuitive, and thus subjective, deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its constituents. Polkinghorne (1992) offers two rigorous thought processes: reflection and imaginative variation. Reflection refers to the process of careful reading of each natural meaning unit to understand the experience which is actually being described. For Polkinghorne (1992, p.54) imaginative variation refers to “a type of mental imagination in which the researcher intentionally alters, through imagination, various aspects of the experience, either subtracting or adding to the proposed transformation”. Variation by this method allows for testing of situational experiences that would alter the underlying common meaning. For Giorgi (1975) this variation allows for a test of correctness, in that another researcher can take the transformation and work back through variation to reach the original expression in the subject’s non-psychological language.

In this section the illustrative narratives from all of the protocols are offered as one set of transformed meaning units expressed in phenomenological based psychological language (section 5.2.4 will then integrate the units themselves into a relevatory general description of meaning).

The meaning units are ordered temporally in five broad sections according to what was found to be common across the twelve subjects. Original descriptive statements common to many of the subjects are illustrated under each heading, to capture the depth of the individual experiences i.e. still allow the victims to speak for themselves. Psychological description is then used to summarise and more accurately convey the general meaning that commonly occurs for the majority of the subjects in each stage.

The five broad sections are presented under the following captions, with illustrative, quotations: (a) Living a violated life, (b) Deciding whether to testify, (c) Testifying, (d) Realising the space between truth and justice, and (e) Forgiving in order to move on.

**(a) Living a violated life**

The common life experience for victims prior to testifying is one of suffering. Victims experience a sense of loss, as a void or gap in their lives which is incomplete. The place in their lives that was occupied by the deceased is not able to be filled with other meaningful relationships. The story of the loved one's life is incomplete without information in the form of eye witness testimony about how or why the deceased was killed. The victim experiences suffering as the long term consequence of gross human rights violations. Suffering takes the form of lost meaningful relationships, physical disability and financial loss.

- “We woke up one morning and our house was on fire. Our possessions and livestock were stolen .... We fled our area without anything ... we have relied on assistance ever since.” (Subject Seven)
- “When I got shot. I asked myself, why me? ... My memory started to leave me.... My past started to black-out. My memory today is very bad, very poor.... I have since developed aggression and all sorts of problems.... I was unable to work for a period of seven months.” (Subject Five)
- “I have suffered for 18 years, since my brother's death in detention, and my subsequent quest for justice. My life felt like a jigsaw and I became obsessed with the great difficulty of fitting together the scraps of information about his death.... I suffered financial loss and instability at home ... both my wife and I suffered with depression ... my wife repeatedly attempted suicide.” (Subject One)
- “I was victimised by the security police.” (Subject One)
- “My life went down the drain because of the threats I received.” (Subject Eight).

**(b) Deciding whether to testify**

The decision to testify at the TRC arises against a background of suffering, long borne and as such an integral part of the subject's life-world. The decision thus weighs heavily, experienced as a gateway to a constituted future, suggesting the possibility for closure to the incomplete life story of the deceased relative. However,

as a focal point of the suffering caused by the past life rupture, the TRC has the potential to bring the traumatic violation back into the subject's present life which, if not balanced with closure, will lead to re-traumatisation.

Hence the constituting of the TRC raises the twin conditions of hope for completion through the serving of justice in the uncovering of the truth through testimony. However, the possibility of painful secondary traumatisation is also raised where justice may not prevail or the truth may not surface in the resultant testimony of the perpetrators.

- “Our parents were fearful and against us going (but) we felt that at last we had someone to listen ... the government hadn't wanted to listen, no matter how many letters we wrote.” (Subject Two)
- “I went to the TRC to find out who killed my husband and why. My children also wanted to know ... but my son refused to go ... he said that if he saw them (the killers) at the TRC, he feared that he would try to kill them.” (Subject Eight)
- “I debated long and hard with myself and decided to go to the TRC for the following reasons: (Subject One)
  - (a) To record publicly what happened to my brother,
  - (b) To make it known to the TRC that all perpetrators should be arrested and brought to court,
  - (c) To make it known that only the victim can pardon.”
- “I had hoped that my reasons for going would be fulfilled, but my misgivings proved right ... as I was not happy with its (TRC) composition ... the most important point that was missing was Justice ... truth could have been left out, because with justice, the truth would come out.” (Subject One)
- “My mother refused to go ... she said that I should go and speak, because if she spoke the hurt would come back.” (Subject One).

**(c) Testifying at the TRC**

Drawn to tell their story as an opportunity to establish closure, yet in a state of anticipatory anxiety, the victims bear witness to their own life story, and simultaneously those of other victims. The freedom to testify is marked as a freedom to re-experience, and have publicly validated as a witnessed truth the trauma of the past gross human rights violation. The victim re-lives the original trauma in the act of testifying. The victims have not been prepared for the full force of the trauma re-visited, and experience distress, some losing consciousness. However, the victims do report some form of cathartic emotion release.

- “I felt so good, very good in such a way that I said it all ... all I wanted to say without and fear.” (Subject Five)
- “There was no fear and I spoke freely ... but there was an element of sadness.” (Subject One)
- “It was a shock, and an awakening for me ... that others had suffered and we never knew ... I wept for the other mothers.” (Subject Two)
- “After 18 years the trauma was brought to life and hurt me again.” (Subject One)
- “When it was my turn to speak I started recalling the day my husband was shot.” (Subject Eight)
- “Preparing to go the TRC, I grew a moustache like my brother’s, and had spectacles made like his. When I looked in the mirror I didn’t recognise myself.” (Subject One)
- “I felt as if my wounds were starting to ooze again. The pain kept on and I fell to the floor. I recall that I woke up and went back to talk.” (Subject Eight)
- “Then they asked us questions ... I couldn’t take it ... the questions were so hurtful, not that they tried to hurt us, but the questions went deep.” (Subject Twelve)
- “The TRC is a good thing because the truth can be told. I felt some relief after speaking to the TRC. The TRC is a bad thing because I wasn’t equipped to handle the emotions. The emotions came out in full force.” (Subject Two).

**(d) Realising the space between truth and justice**

The testimony of the victims provides for a place of contextual truth. That which is spoken and publicly witnessed by the commissioners as significant others and the public, takes the form of “co-constituted truth” – stories held meaningful in the space of the TRC. In this sense the TRC is revealed as a holding-space for untold stories of past violations that are witnessed as the truth and validated by the presence of the witnesses at the proceedings. In so doing, the TRC is also revealed for what it is not – a judicial forum to judge offenders without trial and to deliver punishment as a form of justice. The realisation of the space between truth and justice as separate forums, creates reactions of anger in victims whose expectations are not met.

- “I suddenly realised (when I spoke at the TRC) that my sister was never coming back. I was filled with a terrible anger.” (Subject Two)
- “We expected justice. I am angry that they just pardoned them. I want to appeal to the Minister of Justice.” (Subject Eight)
- “While I accepted their offer to help and therefore their apologies, I felt angry because I felt that they had forgotten the relish that they took in carrying out their tasks.” (Subject One)
- “After speaking at the TRC, I returned home and felt angry and became even more depressed. We wanted justice. The funeral is not complete without the truth and justice.” (Subject One).

At the same time, the victims’ public testimony afforded the status of witnessed “truth” creates the twin conditions of guilt, and fear of legal prosecution in the case of the perpetrators. The victims face the possibility of further victimisation in the form of death threats, or reconciliation where the perpetrator suffers remorse.

- “After I had spoken at the TRC, I was approached by a security policeman who said he had been in contact with someone who was involved with my brother’s death. I believe that this man, and the Indian security policeman who he introduced me to, were trying to curry favour with me to show that

they had reformed. They said that they were sorry about what had happened, and blamed the apartheid system.” (Subject One)

- “A car followed us after the TRC, and we tried to escape. We were phoned and threatened with death. When we went back home ... I was accosted by hired killers, they put a gun to my head ... I denied who I was and fainted.” (Subject Eight)
- “Then the Amnesty Hearings started. They told the story of what they did. To our surprise they were pardoned. The commander of the hit squad came to us at the TRC and shook our hands and asked for forgiveness.” (Subject Eight).

**(e) Forgiving in order to move on**

The telling of the truth allows for opportunities for interpersonal forgiveness, and hence a sense of closure for the victims. The phenomenon of the TRC as public place of truth telling, sets forth the conditions for forgiveness, and brings closure to the long held background of a life experience of violation in rupture. In those circumstances, where the perpetrator is moved to confess and asks the victim for forgiveness and the victim is moved to forgive, both parties experience closure and are able to move on.

- “Since they personally asked for forgiveness, I said I forgive them, as long as they acknowledge the truth. If the people ask you to forgive, you have to forgive. Only you can forgive, the courts can’t forgive.” (Subject Eight)
- “Since I’ve forgiven when they asked, I am relieved. I now have peace in my heart. I can walk free, and he is now free to walk. We haven’t been threatened since the Amnesty Hearings.” (Subject Eight)
- “After all this at least the truth has come out. No matter what state you are in, at least it is better to know before you die.” (Subject Eight).

**In those cases where the victim is unable/unwilling to forgive, there is unresolved anger and further life-world deterioration**

- “He (the perpetrator) is always in the media. I still battle with the loss. I can’t forgive him for taking a life, and for the trauma of our family. I have been under psychiatric care ever since the TRC. I have attempted suicide, and been hospitalised three times ... I had to carry the huge financial burden of the hospitalisations. I’ve never been offered restitution, nor received the offer of a support group.” (Subject Two)
- “Had the truth come out, and a confession, then the speaking would have brought us some comfort ... we wanted justice. It’s like a coffin in the home that cannot be buried. Only when the funeral is concluded (the coffins buried), then the process of healing can start. The process of healing has been retarded in my brothers case by the unknown.” (Subject One)
- “A year later (after the TRC) I phoned Dr M and she sent me to T. psychiatric hospital. This was too late and my wife left me. It was an accumulation ... it was the factory loss, and we had lost a lot of my wife’s money. My life is now a big mess.” (Subject One).

#### **5.2.4 General Psychological Structure**

In this stage, what is sought is a general description which explicates the essential meaning of the experience of speaking at the TRC, i.e. what is common for all of the participants. In a general description, it is possible to reveal how each constituent of the experience relates to and illuminates each of the other constituents as part of the general experience (Fischer & Wertz, 1979, p.147).

The victim is called to speak through the political-legal convening of the TRC. The possibility of telling of one’s story, and its public recording as the “truth” is made possible through the public forum attended by significant figures representing a new social order. Just as the victim could not avoid the original life ruption so, too, the TRC cannot be avoided in its double-edged possibilities for reparation of the ruptured

life-world, and its risk of compounded trauma should the victim's expectations not be fulfilled.

The TRC thus represents the focal point of the victim's life. It reveals the past as an open violation of a social harmony, the present consequences lived as unfilled life world relationships and potentials, and represents an unavoidable gateway to a restored future through forgiveness and reparation. As a gateway, the TRC offers the possibility to bring closure to the uncompleted life-story of the deceased relative, and closure to the relationship with the subject.

Driven by the desire for revenge, the victim anticipates the TRC as an omnipotent judicial forum. The victim's expectations are boundless including; the satisfaction of safely telling of one's story in public and through being heard publicly as recorded "truth"; that the TRC will gather further evidence by investigation; the compelling of "confession" by perpetrators; restoration of the bodies of lost ones to their relatives; and the granting of significant financial reparations. The magnitude of these expectations reflects the degree of the victim's anger, which in turn reflects the depth and length of time of suffering. The face of depression masks underlying black anger over the undeserved and traumatic ruptures of the victim's life-world. The emotional affect of anger has functionally transformed the victim from a devastated soul into a de-humanised person obsessed with a quest for revenge. Significant present relationships are denied by the victim in his/her obsessive quest for justice. Encaptured by the past, the victim remains de-humanised, i.e. unable to live in the present in terms of its constituent potential life-world relationships.

Speaking at the TRC, the victim is released from the past fear of state retributions, and is temporally freed of intimidation. In the safe space of public witnessing, the victim's life story is recorded and accorded respect through being allowed to unfold, which provides relief in its reconstitution as a real and thus meaningful life event. As witnessed and meaningfully recorded, the life story is accorded the status of

“public truth”, which in turn accords the victim and their deceased loved ones significant respect.

Simultaneously, the victim bears witness to his own life story and thus calls the past into present being in its full magnitude. These revelations, and the realisation of the life trauma and its consequences, impacts “awfully”. The pain returns in its full force and the victim is temporarily rendered speechless as the magnitude of the acts emerge as “unspeakable” human rights violations. In these instances, the victim breaks-down, temporarily retreating from a full consciousness of the impact of the past pain and the enormity of the potential life that was lost as a consequence of the violation.

The speaking of the victim, and its public hearing, constitutes a “truth” recorded. For the victim, the consequences range from relief to public harassment by lawyers and reporters, to further attempts on their lives by perpetrators. The magnitude of emotional investment in the TRC as a focal point, and thus as a possible gateway to a reconstituted future, cocoons the victim in a space of heightened expectation. Where there is no further harassment, the victim initially enjoys the attention and status of a “public figure”. Psychological counselling is routinely offered, and typically focuses on post trauma support. Where the TRC begins investigation based on the victim’s evidence, the victim experiences empowerment and begins to overcome the experience of the self-as-victim. Hope for justice replaces depression, as anger has been expressed, and a cathartic re-living of the trauma has temporally released the victim from the past.

In the longer term, reality replaces relief, and hope fades to an inevitable emotional state of disappointment. Where no further evidence is uncovered or if the body of the loved one is not recovered, the victim re-experiences anger and acute frustration. Social relationships are negatively affected as the victim retreats back into a life-world of preoccupation with the unfilled expectation of justice. Counselling is typically sought in terms of the existential life-dilemma as the victim experiences alienation and further deterioration in the capacity to cope, as a consequence of

secondary traumatisation. Where the victim has access to, and receives adequate counselling, there is an opportunity for mourning as the reality of permanent loss and irreversible life-world changes are worked through. However, many victims either do not have access to, or turn away from relationships including therapy, and regress to despair and bitterness.

The testimony and public witnessing of the victim's truth impacts on the perpetrators with positive or negative consequences. The perpetrators, too, cannot avoid the consequences of the "truth being told" in the form of their public guilt. They may seek to silence the witness for self protection in the event of the TRC recommending prosecution. The perpetrators may also be moved to seek amnesty without fear of punishment, as a consequence of the function of the TRC to grant pardon, where the violation is deemed to be politically motivated.

A positive outcome in the latter case is the possibility for forgiveness. In the application for amnesty, perpetrators may confess and ask for forgiveness from the victims, and in rare cases approach the victim and personally express regret and ask for forgiveness. Where regret is expressed and forgiveness requested, the victim feels bound to forgive, as the act of confession is given and heard in human relationship. In restoring the human relationship, the victim's life experience is validated and the opportunity for a meaningful future is recovered. However, the act of forgiveness is a human one which also restores the victim to a validated life position. For the victim, the confession and the granting of forgiveness, does not negate the need for the perpetrator to pay his/her dues. Justice is seen to reside in the efforts that the perpetrator must make in attempting to restore the lost social harmony and life-world fabric, and the punishment that must be faced as a legal consequence of the actions.

The magnitude of the TRC, as a focal point of public and private life that brings together the past, present and future in its potentiality for resolution, means that to each and every participant, no matter what the degree of resolution or lack of described above, there will by <sup>naturally</sup> its nature be some sense of unfulfilled expectation.

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Where confession has or has not been heard, the issue of reparation promised or implied by the state remains unaddressed. The State President, in parliamentary address, recognised the unexpected magnitude of the violations, and announced that financial reparations would be largely symbolic, placing the role of the TRC primarily as a healing of the soul through the speaking and witnessing of public “truth”. Similarly, the psychological consequences of a re-living but not working-through of the trauma remains untreated, much as the original violations were not tended to, either physically, emotionally or legally.

## CHAPTER 6

### Discussion of Results

This study's investigation of the experience of victims who spoke at the TRC has illuminated the multiple meanings of the experience, and indicated that in some circumstances a healing outcome is possible.

These findings have important implications for the current philosophical debate about the nature of "truth", and the healing potential of public testimony. Furthermore, these findings extend our understanding of the nature of forgiveness from the personal context, (Rowe et al., 1989; and Fow, 1996) to that of forgiveness in the public context which the TRC sought to promote.

Whether the form and process of giving public testimony has provided for national reconciliation beyond that of promoting personal forgiveness is beyond the scope of this study. Other studies and methods will be needed to investigate the experiences of perpetrators and commissioners, and the approach of the TRC in its broader socio-political context as it sought to promote national reconciliation. The research study by de la Rey and Owens (1998) is a first and only known example of an empirical study of the TRC in the above context, which has found preliminary evidence of a positive connection between testimony and national reconciliation.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that given the necessary conditions, public testimony has the potential to facilitate the healing process of forgiveness, and thus has significant therapeutic value for victims who have suffered gross human rights violations. The aspirations of the TRC, and claims made that public testimony by victims has promoted healing through forgiveness, was found to be valid in certain circumstances, i.e. public testimony can be therapeutic under certain conditions. These conditions will be discussed as they reflect this study's finding that the phenomenon of public testimony is a thoroughly dialectical, interpersonal and transformational process.

### **6.1 The dialectical nature of “truth” in public testimony**

A significant theme emerging from victims’ descriptions was that the giving of public testimony at the TRC was experienced as a focal point of their lives, bringing together all that was meaningful as past, present and future. A necessary condition for a healing outcome of testimony, was that the forum be experienced as meaningful both personally and publicly. Halling (1996, p.21) observes that “the search for personal and historical truth often come together”. Victims who felt “called” to speak, sought to establish what had happened to their loved ones or their remains, and to place what had happened on public record as the “truth”. A call to speak the “truth” emerges from, and against the social ground of the “unrevealed”, i.e. falsity of the period of apartheid. The “truth” in this sense not only requires a witness (Halling, 1996) in a public forum, but also emerges as a dialectical process of public revealing against a background of personal suppression. Hayes (1998, p.31) describes the TRC as a place where “the personal and the political intersect; personal stories are being given a political and historical voice, and the political is being peopled with individual stories.”

In this light, the TRC may be described as a place of dialogue, constituting the truth as it emerges at the intersection of a repressed personal past, and publicly expressed hope for a healed future.

The TRC constitutes a place for the past to be revealed, as a present truth witnessed in its implications that are meaningful personally and publicly, as a socio-historical reminder of what the future must not be allowed to become. In this sense, the TRC, as a public record of the “truth”, seeks to offer a dialectic of what the future should be, as an oppositional horizon to what has been.

### **6.2 The dialectical propensity of testimony to promote healing, or further suffering**

A second fundamentally dialectic aspect of the nature of public testimony, is its propensity to promote healing, or to engender further suffering. The general description of the experience of giving public testimony has shown that the “calling”

to speak, is experienced as an approach-avoidance phenomenon. The victim anticipates the speaking in its twin potentialities for relief through validation/justice, and as a painful re-experiencing of the past which may not bring desired resolution. This experience of ambivalence in a sense validates the earlier phenomenologically orientated study of Fischer and Wertz (1979), who found that being criminally victimised means a loss of one's taken-for-granted future life as it is expected to unfold in its life potentials. Victims who gave testimony described how they had lost their future, i.e. experienced an arrested growth, against which the TRC then arose as a healing gateway for moving on. However, the ambivalence of victims suggests that the giving of testimony alone may not be sufficient for healing to occur. This study has found that the healing outcome of testimony depends on the interpersonal dimension, i.e. that healing through the act of forgiveness, is an interpersonal process, or must be experienced in dialogue with a significant other/s.

### **6.3 Testimony in relation to, and for the sake of, forgiving another**

A fundamental assumption of the TRC was that the act of testimony would provide a form of catharsis, which in turn would promote forgiveness and healing. The TRC commissioners, comprised mainly of lawyers, psychologists and ministers, did make post-trauma counselling available, implicitly recognising the possibility of secondary traumatisation through testimony. However, the form of counselling remained largely within the medical model and focussed on trauma de-briefing (de la Rey and Owens, 1998; Stein, 1998). The regional hearings that did facilitate or encourage the formation of support groups, or the use of traditional African modes of therapy, allowed for significant healing to occur (Hamber, 1998).

This study supports the findings of Hamber (1998), that testimony alone is not sufficient to promote healing. The TRC raised issues of justice and financial reparation which have not been dealt with. Gobodo-Madikizela (1997) and Orr (1998) as commissions serving on the R.R.C. committee, have stated that in retrospect, the issue of reparation should have been allocated for, and the conditions of justice explicated fully for participants prior to the commencement of the TRC.

Giving testimony in itself was accompanied by feelings of relief, once the regressive re-living of the painful experience had passed. This present study, as a follow-up a year to eighteen months after victims had testified, found that it was those who were able to forgive through an interpersonal effort to dialogue with the perpetrator that experienced therapeutic healing. Victims who had been approached for forgiveness by perpetrators, stated that they were able to forgive since the confession acknowledged the “truth”. However, this forgiveness for the victims did not mean that the perpetrators were absolved of facing justice, and they were still required to make atonement for their actions.

The importance of this interpersonal dimension is also indicated in the experience of the researcher in the qualitative nature of the present study. Qualitative research seeking to understand the meaning of human experience, is by definition engaged research. Halling (1996) argues that the researcher is a participant-witness to the unfolding “truth” of the subject’s testimony. In an interview situation with two mothers who had both lost sons in the struggle, the mother who had had a perpetrator approach her and express regret, was able to speak freely with the researcher of her experience of healing through forgiveness. Her colleague was not able, nor willing to speak, and in the silence between them, the researcher felt “moved” to apologise for his past complacency as a beneficiary of apartheid. In this interview context of participation, as meaningful dialogue, the victim spoke for the first time stating that she understood that any such action would have met with similar state repression. This interaction was experienced as therapeutic and healing by both the victim and the researcher. From a phenomenological standpoint, the “truth” in research arises in the meaning-giving gestures and context of the dialogue (Halling, 1996). In this sense, the understanding of testimony as co-constituted truth, is extended to include the interpersonal context in which the participants bear witness to the truth as it is meaningful, in relation to their respective dialectical standpoints. Furthermore, this study places testimony as healing in relation to the presence of an other, or someone who may represent a significant other. In the context of the TRC “confession” is the meaningful context, although the meaning-giving activity and therapeutic outcome

may vary depending on the nature of the violation and social conditions. Commenting from a psychoanalytic perspective on the need for more than catharsis as part of the healing endeavour of public testimony, Hayes (1998) calls for space and time for victims who spoke at the TRC to work through their experiences more fully. Hayes (1998, p.34) argues that “telling the stories of what happened might give us the truth, but psychological reparation, and political reconciliation are historical projects that are going to require the re-telling of the stories, and their (re-) interpretation many times over, until they have been worked through”. Clearly from a phenomenological perspective this “working through” relates to meaning-giving through ongoing dialogue with a significant other/s. This finding supports the viewpoint expressed by Romanyshyn (1996) who states that in psychotherapy, it is the presence of the therapist which involves not so much what he knows, but who he is, which opens a space for healing through the telling of the story.

A psychoanalytic interpretation of the above interpersonal response by the researcher might focus on aspects of transference and counter-transference. However, from a phenomenological perspective the “truth” emerges in dialectic relation to, and in contrast with, a significant other who represents the opposing other/ground of figuration. Many of the participants stated that it is only the victim who is morally placed to forgive, which by implication indicates that only the perpetrator can apologise. In this sense apologising is not an admission of guilt, as much as it is received as a validation of the “truth”, i.e. what was importantly “lost” to the victim. What is received is an “attitude of respect” which restores to the victim a sense of human dignity that the experience of being victimised has been found to take away (Fischer and Wertz, 1979). In their request to speak to a white male researcher without the presence of a black interpreter, the two black mothers revealed that the TRC had offered them follow-up counselling at a local psychiatric hospital. However, their experience of over-crowded conditions, and long hours of waiting, had compounded the experience of secondary trauma. The attitude of respect afforded them in speaking to the researcher was deemed to have helped to restore their lost dignity.

#### **6.4 Testimony and the dialectics of speaking and communicating the unspeakable**

A further dialectical aspect of the experience of public testimony is its form of communication as being both verbal and non-verbal in nature. The painful remembering of the witnesses as they bore witness to their own stories, led to moments of “unspeakable” anguish. The victims described this as a feeling of being unable to communicate “that which is beyond words”, yet still wanting their stories to be heard. Gerber, Harrington and Kerr (1996, p.26) in their description of the similar difficulty of Cambodian survivors to articulate their feelings, ask whether this is indicative of “a lack of contemporary language, and even paradigms for the kind of connections that were made in the interviews”. The embodiment of this unspeakable experience was symbolised in the physical distress and breaking down of many of the participants. They described this as a feeling that it was too painful to hear one’s own soul speaking. Romanyshyn (1996) describes this dialectic nature of the “unspeakable” in terms of symptomatic “bodily” language, and argues that language of suffering is symbolised in the form of dreams and best articulated in the form of poetic discourse, to capture the deeper experience of suffering, which language cannot fully articulate. This finding suggests that the supportive functions that were provided both at the TRC, and by post-TRC structures needed to address the desire for victims not only to verbally, but also symbolically articulate; to make meaning of and come to terms with their experiences.

#### **6.5 Testimony and the dialectic of forgiving oneself and others**

This study’s finding that healing may follow from genuine dialogue in the form of testimony witnessed interpersonally, even in the absence of the living other, is also apparent in the often expressed request by victims for the TRC to find out what happened to a loved one, or to assist in recovering the body.

The inability of victims to afford their lost loved one a respectful burial, was found to be a significant factor in the victims’ feeling of being ashamed and guilty. Similarly, the abduction and unexplained disappearance of a loved one, left family members shamed in the eyes of their community. In this sense, the shame of the

victims lay in their inability to accord their relatives a respectful burial, which validates the findings of Halling (1994) that shame corresponds to a sense of personal inadequacy, and that guilt is experienced in response to an awareness that the person has damaged a valued relationship.

More significantly, this study places the experience of self-forgiveness as essentially taking place in an inter-personal context, where the participant experiences it phenomenologically. In the interview with the victim who sought to establish the truth of his brother's disappearance, this effort was of great importance since his brother was an esteemed doctor in the community. For this person, self-forgiveness required that he witness the truth for his deceased loved one, in the living world. He felt responsible to validate the meaningful reality of his brother's existence by establishing the manner in which he died, in the dialectical sense that the manner of one's death is a final validation of one's existence. For the victim, finding and burying the body of the loved one is a responsibility which must be completed, much as the epitaph must be written, without which the deceased relative cannot "forgive" the still living relative for not completing his/her life story.

#### **6.6 Testimony and the transformational nature of forgiveness**

This study suggests that forgiving the other is made possible through a change in perspective, or life orientation of the victim. For many of the victims, speaking at the TRC was accompanied by a sense of humility. Participants noted that this sense of compassion occurred when the sufferings of others on both sides of the political spectrum were perceived to be as great as their own. An essential but unexpected aspect of their public testimony was that the opportunity to serve as a witness to other victims' testimony which would otherwise have not arisen. Halling (1994, p.109) suggests that forgiveness is a movement of compassion, in which the other or their situation is suddenly seen to be similar to one's own. Giving testimony and hearing testimony at the TRC helped those participants to hear in other victims, and even perpetrators, feelings and circumstances similar to their own. In this sense public testimony may be understood as an interpersonal relating, in which anger is replaced

with compassion or even humility, as the sufferings of others are likened to one's own position, or perceived to be even greater than one's own.

This shift in awareness, from a concern with one's own life position, to an ability to relate to others, helps to reveal a broader concern with one's life that is still to be led. As one participant stated "when I returned from speaking at the TRC, I told my wife that we had 20 years to make up for".

However, while the public nature of the giving of testimony holds a transformational possibility of reconnecting with others in a similar position, the opening up of the victim's private life has equally counter-therapeutic effects. The study by de la Rey and Owens (1998, p.266) has identified this need for privacy amid the very public nature of the TRC hearings, especially in the case of women who had suffered sexual abuse. In this instance it is important to note that while the TRC did not initially begin with a provision for private hearings, the facility was later made available.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusions

This study has investigated the experience of victims who spoke at the TRC regional hearings of KwaZulu-Natal. The research method has followed an empirical-phenomenological approach to develop an understanding of the deeper meaning of the participants' experiences. The researcher sought an emersion in the phenomenon, and in this sense the emerging themes reflect the interpersonal nature of the dialogue which took place between the researcher and participants. This study is a record of their shared understanding and shared meaning that they made of the experience of giving public testimony. As Rowe et al. (1989, p.238) note in their study of the experience of forgiving another in a personal relationship, "the dialogue was not merely between ourselves 'about' the data, but more a dialogue 'with' the phenomenon."

The findings of this study of the phenomenology of public testimony in the context of the TRC broadly support its claim to have facilitated a healing process through testimony and the promotion of forgiveness. The chairman of the TRC, Archbishop Tutu (1998, p.2) concluded that: "Yes, we believe that the TRC has contributed to healing and to reconciliation, or has provided the setting where confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation have happened." However, Tutu (1998, p.2) adds that "the TRC did not fully recognise the complex nature of healing that was sought through the process of public testimony". The TRC report (1998) acknowledges the concerns of psychologists about secondary traumatisation, and the commissioners themselves have acknowledged that in retrospect more thought needed to have taken place around addressing the follow-up support of participants (Orr, 1998 and Mkhize, 1998).

This study indicates that the telling of one's story as a therapeutic endeavour is complex in that it has a multiplicity of meaning for the participant and is content and contextually dependent. This dialectical, interpersonal and transformational nature of public testimony supports the findings of Rowe et al. (1989) and Fow (1996) which found the same themes

in a personal context. This paper's finding that testimony is not simply a cathartic process, also indicates that the provision of post-trauma counselling alone is not sufficient for the healing through forgiveness that the TRC sought to facilitate. The TRC banner proclaiming that "Revealing is healing" reflects the one dimensional level of the assumption of catharsis that was taken to be sufficient for healing (Hayes, 1998). Within the KwaZulu-Natal region some 9 to 18 months after the victims testified, there is an urgent need for longer term psychotherapy, or other indigenous and symbolic forms of counselling that would enable participants to work through their experiences at a deeper level. In these healing endeavours, this study has found that it is critical to the healing process that they make the profound life meanings that this study has indicated are required for a truly therapeutic healing to be achieved.

Furthermore, many of the victims' expectations which included justice through investigation of the truth; the finding of the bodies of loved ones, and financial reparations, remained unresolved for many of participants in this study. Therapeutic efforts are needed to address these unmet expectations, given the TRC's statement that reparations will be largely symbolic (Orr, 1998; Mkhize, 1998).

This study's finding that the nature of public testimony for victims is dialectical and interpersonal, indicates that revealing is much more than healing. Revealing, as in the telling of one's story in an effort to establish and record the truth of the period, may be better described as an uncovering of co-constituted truth. The phenomenology of truth emerges as a participant relevant exercise. Hence the truth recorded by the TRC pertains to that which is uncovered between the participants, while the truth of the period also refers to that which still lies unrecovered between those who did not participate. The sample group for this study reflected the demographics of the participants, being comprised predominantly of black female mothers of deceased anti-apartheid activists. Further research is needed to validate this study's general description of the experience of giving testimony to other regional hearings of the TRC and for other groups, including that of the perpetrators.

This study needs complementary research into the experience of commissioners who not only heard witness testimony but responded with questions and statements of personal relevance. Further research is also needed to determine the connection between individual healing through truth and forgiveness, and national healing through truth and reconciliation, of which the study of de la Rey and Owens (1998) has made a beginning.

A final recommendation of this study pertains to the largely exclusive nature of the TRC as it sought to function as a legal-religious body promoting healing through testimony and forgiveness. Hayes (1998) refers to a concern with an opportunity that might be lost, and calls for a framework to locate the individual stories within the dialectic of a social process in which the broader community can participate. The exclusive nature of the TRC refers not to the invitation to apply for permission to speak, nor to the open opportunity to all to sign the register of national reconciliation. Rather this tendency towards exclusivity refers to the officials who, while doing their best to serve as commissioners, have not been able to mobilise therapeutic nor research support from the broader psychological profession in South Africa. This study has indicated the immense need for long term follow-up therapy to enable victims to meaningful work through their experience of testifying at the TRC as the focal point of their lives. This study concurs with the findings of de la Rey and Owens (1998, p.269), who conclude that: “through asking questions, offering analyses, and conducting research, psychologists, other social scientists, and other sectors of civil society have an important role to play in enhancing the potential of the commission in realising psycho-social rehabilitation in South Africa.” What remains desperately unanswered for the victims interviewed in this study is: who will take responsibility for providing this network of support services to help them work through the long term effects of their experience of testifying at the TRC hearings?

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## APPENDIX

### Subject One: Indian Male, mid forties, 15 April 1998

When the concept of the TRC was announced, I was not happy with its make-up for three reasons.

Of the three points, the most important point that was missing was Justice. It should have been Truth, Justice and Reconciliation. Truth could have been left out because with justice, the truth would come out, e.g. Catholic Church Trust and Justice.

I debated for a long time with myself and decided to go even though I was not entirely happy without the Justice component.

My reasons for going were:

- To record publically what happened to my brother. I believe that all atrocities should be recorded, not just from a certain year onwards.
- To make it known to the TRC that all perpetrators should be arrested and brought to court. I made the point that no person/body had the right to pardon perpetrators – only the victim could pardon. It is immoral if anyone else tried to do it.

I had hoped that my reasons for going would be fulfilled. I had hoped that perhaps the TRC would not be what we had expected. But my misgivings proved right.

Are you familiar with my brother's case? He was assaulted and found dead the following morning.

Since his unexplained death in detention there are 1001 questions at the forefront of my mind. I put these questions to the TRC. I hoped that the TRC would investigate what happened. In 18 years we hadn't made any progress.

At the TRC I met a security policeman who said he would be at the inquest. He said he had been in contact with someone who was involved with my brother's death. He offered to contact the man for me. I met the Indian security policeman. He told me very little. I could have written what he told me. This confirmed my suspicions of 18 years. The fellow said he knew much more. I passed on the information to the TRC, and they subpoenaed him to appear. He told them a little more detail. He wouldn't mention names, and would not implicate himself. He name Col. J. as the assaulter of my brother. The TRC subpoenaed Col. J., who denied everything.

I am not happy with the TRC.

Because only Col. J. was named by the witness, they only subpoenaed him. Yet I had named others. They should have subpoenaed Col. J.'s superiors, Messrs D. and M. All the Indian policemen should have been subpoenaed.

One name didn't feature in all reports, that of B. Only when I spoke to this witness did the name B. come out. I believe that this fellow first spoke to me, to curry favour. To show that he has reformed. All of them claimed to be victims of apartheid and forced to do jobs. They said they were sorry.

They forget the relish they showed in doing the job. My brother's friends have contacted me and asked why nothing had been done about my brother's death.

I had the expectation that something would emerge from the TRC. Nothing dramatic or startling emerged. The perpetrators stated that he was just beaten and died. No dirty tricks were mentioned. Some friends expressed the belief that since there was no publicity value, the TRC hasn't taken this thing further.

I go for therapy and initially saw Mr M. Now Ms T. is my therapist. You will need to distinguish the TRC from my other problem.

Since my brother's death and my quest for justice I was victimised by the security police. My business declined. I suffered financial loss and instability at home.

Both my wife and I suffered depression, my wife was suicidal. After speaking at the TRC I phoned Dr M. and she sent me to T. hospital. This was too late and my wife left me last year. Since then she has been living with another person, and died in January 1998, shot in the head. The police are looking into it – I'm not convinced it was suicide. They suspect murder.

My life is a big mess.

Nobody knew anything about my brother's activities. Friends and colleagues didn't know. Two persons recently admitted that they knew something. We are still trying to find out since 1977. It is like a jigsaw, with difficulty fitting scraps of information together.

About the TRC. They don't respond to correspondence easily. I wrote saying a friend in the U.S.A. would like to come and speak. They haven't responded.

**Subject 1:** You can guide me by asking questions.

**Interviewer:** *Has speaking at the TRC changed your life? Are you different?*

**Subject 1:** Not really. Everything I told the TRC was public knowledge. The only thing that was different was that I was able to express my opinion.

**Interviewer:** *Describe the experience of speaking – of expressing your opinion.*

**Subject 1:** A very important difference was that there was no fear. At the TRC I spoke freely. In the past I was fearful of being harassed. I spoke with conviction.

There was an element of sadness. After 18 years the trauma was brought to life again. We relived 1977 (in a way). For example, my mother was living in Johannesburg for a number of years. She wouldn't come down, she said "No, you go and speak. If I speak and hear, it will come to life and hurt me again."

The reason it comes to life is because there are a lot of unknowns. We don't know how he died. The four hours are still missing, i.e. from midnight to 4.00 am we do not know what happened. (Unlike the Biko case where the confession came out.)

We can't prove a stitch as they deny it and say that they locked him up at midnight. They are safe in the four hours and "they're basking in that safety".

There was hope that the TRC would find out the truth. Nothing has emerged. They didn't try very hard either.

Had the truth come out and a confession, then the speaking would have brought us some comfort.

Then we wanted justice.

That funeral is not complete without the truth and justice.

This unknown factor has plagued us for 21 years. It's like a coffin in the home that can't be buried. When the funeral is concluded (the coffin burned), then the process of healing can start.

The process of healing has been retarded in my brother's case by the unknown.

I have been accused of being obsessed by his death, at everyone else's expense. I don't believe that, but it certainly changed my life and its direction.

At the TRC I grew a moustache like my brother's, and had spectacles made like his. Then I looked in the mirror and didn't recognise myself.

The mistake I made was it was not me. After the TRC I took the scissors and cut off the moustache. Then it was me. I told my wife "We've got 19 years to catch up". She said "You've realised it 19 years too late".

It was an accumulation. If it was just my wife and me, we could have coped. But it was the factory loss and we had lost a lot of my wife's money. I was not conscious of any marital discord. My wife gave me a lot of happiness – she supported me. How could I have got happiness if she wasn't happy? The manner of her death disturbed me.

**Subject Two: White Female, late thirties, 7 May 1998.**

Our parents were fearful and against us going.

We (my sister and I) felt that at last we had someone to listen. The Nationalist government didn't want to listen, no matter how many letters we wrote.

I experienced the day at the TRC as daunting and humiliating. It was a very emotional experience to hear other people's traumas. That these women had suffered so terribly.

Some of the commissioners were rude. I felt that they tried to humiliate me. Perhaps they were too hard.

Speaking at the TRC opened up a can of worms. We hadn't talked about the death of my sister although Mr M. was in the media a lot.

I had a nervous breakdown a month after the TRC. My parents and media wanted interviews. It was too much for us.

I suddenly realised (due to witnessing) that my sister wasn't coming back. I was filled with a terrible anger. He (Mr M.) is always in the media. I have been under psychiatric care ever since.

TRC is a good thing because the truth can be told.

TRC is a bad thing because I wasn't equipped to handle the emotions. The emotions came out in full force.

I ask "why me?" I also lost a son 15 years ago and then my sister. I'll never accept it, I just have to learn to live with it.

Speaking in front of all those people made me realise that she (my sister) wasn't ever coming back.

I still battle with the loss. Only 4 months ago I bought a plaque and had my family around for a prayer ceremony.

When we walked out of the club (after speaking at the TRC) they took us to a room. We were approached by Dr P. who said the TRC had sent him. He gave us a card. We went to see him and he wanted to see the whole family. My parents refused.

Dr P. referred me to a psychiatrist and she put me on medication. I was hospitalised at E. and she came to see me in hospital three times. I was prescribed anti-depressants and tranquilisers.

My life problems were complicated by the trauma of my sister's death.

A lawyer called to ask me if I wanted him to represent me at the Amnesty Hearing. He asked for names of the other victims. I gave him the names of the other victims. He said he would try and get a better deal for us.

The TRC called to ask if the lawyer was going to represent us at the Amnesty Hearing – I said yes.

I've had anonymous calls from people telling me about Mr M's so called criminal activities. I've been pressured by calls and media after the TRC.

**Interviewer:** *Has your life changed since the TRC?*

**Subject 2:** Yes, emotionally I'm a lot weaker. Maybe the TRC opened the door and let the emotion out. Now I can't handle things any more. I now think of suicide. I think that

in the last month I've begun to get better. Finally the psychiatrist sat my husband down and explained to my husband that this is a real trauma.

So in the last month I've got a lot more support from my family and husband. The last time I was in hospital was in February.

I don't think I can ever forgive him (Mr M). If he does get amnesty I will have to live with it.

I can't forgive him for taking a life, and for the trauma of our family.

What hurt me the most was that my sister was going to America. She had achieved a dream to go to Universal Studios to work with them. He robbed her of that.

Sitting at the TRC I finally realised that my sister wasn't coming back.

I also blame the Nats because it was the bombing the day after the announcement of the State of Emergency that caused our pain and suffering. The Nats should have negotiated sooner, and not laid down unjust laws and apartheid.

I understand the anti-white feelings of the blacks at the time. I would have felt the same. The bombers should have bombed the government. We were innocent people.

I've had to carry a huge financial burden of three hospitalisations, and the medication. I've never been offered restitution and not been offered a support group.

"It was a shock, and an awaking for me. That others had suffered and we never knew, e.g. a mother spoke of seeing her son shot seven times. I wept for the other mothers. That was horrific. How can they give amnesty for that?"



It helps you to know that there are others who have suffered. That there are others who are not mad, as people now think I am because of my breakdowns.

I'm now seeing Dr B. who is an older lady who I can relate to. Dr P. had referred me to a younger psychiatrist who was my age and I couldn't relate to her.

**Subject Three: Black Female, late forties, 8 September 1998.**

I was summoned to appear before the TRC: at their offices I was made to write a statement about the death of my daughter who was murdered by panga, and was later burned to ashes. At the time of her murder I was never called upon to testify, much like the rest of the victims who spoke at the TRC.

The trauma that developed after the incident was relived when I spoke at the TRC.

(Unable to speak about the experience of testifying due to emotional distress.)

I was called after the TRC to be told about the statement I had written. I was also told that as many as 20 000 people have submitted statements. Of the 20 000 people, only 7 000 statements will be considered as having suffered severely. They will be called to receive reparations.

I filled in the reparation forms. But it was never explained to me why I was not allowed to appear before the Reparation Committee of the TRC. I and others were instead referred to an organisation called I. where we were to receive group therapy.

This type of therapy only helped to show that I was not the only person who had experienced hardships involving loved ones. I and some members of my family now need more help in terms of therapy.

(Unable to continue due to emotional distress.)

**Subject Four: Black Female, early fifties, 12 September 1998.**

We were summoned to appear before the TRC, but not afforded the privilege of saying what we wanted. I tried to put forward a case for my grandchildren's needs but I was refused that right. Only the murder of my children were in question. The loss suffered by my grandchildren was not taken into account. I only gave them the details they wanted to hear.

At the Amnesty Hearings I felt that here I was refused the right to question the perpetrators on behalf of my grandchildren.

The perpetrator was prepared to say it all, but the lawyer blocked every move to let him say it all as he knew it. I was shocked by this lawyer's moves and I ended up frustrated and felt pity for the perpetrator. As a result we confronted the lawyer who was handling my brother's case (Mr Z.). We were at a dead-end because he asked me about my children's ages at the time of my husband's death. They were all above the ages of 18 years. I therefore decided to leave things as they were.

We as a family decided to let my elder son, Mr S. pursue the matter alone. But he also ended having said nothing because they did not want to hear anything about my husband's case.

To this point I still feel that my husband's life was wasted and there was nothing really that the TRC could do even when the murderer mentioned all the people he had murdered. The TRC refused him the right to say it all.

It is a great pity that there is nothing one can do because I understand that the murderer is out of jail. We tried all the possible avenues we knew to get relief, but help came from no where. Life is full of frustrating circumstances. We, as a family, are left helpless in terms of the waiving of the TRC.

This summarises the whole question of looking at all these questions.

What can you people do to help?

**Subject Five: Black Male, late forties, 12 September 1998.**

When I got shot, together with my wife, I asked myself, “Why me? What was their reason for wanting to hurt and kill me? I also wondered who it was that wanted me dead. Did he think about me? Did he consider my life cheaper than the money he received to kill us? Did I deserve this?”

Because I could not answer all these questions I became frustrated. Finally I felt battered as I lay in hospital for three months. More thoughts came: were they coming for me as I lay helpless in the hospital bed? My wife was shot, why her? Was it my competitors in business? The answer was no, as I had no visible enemies if that was the case.

My memory started to leave me after the shooting. My past started to blackout. It lapsed. I could not remember much. My memory today is very bad, very poor. I have since developed aggression and all sorts of emotions. I have become emotional and aggressive. Before I was shot my reasoning was fair, but now I cannot stand nonsensical actions. Do not get me wrong when I say I have become emotional. I do not fight anyone except the person I regard as having done me wrong. I do not pass anger and my emotions onto somebody not concerned with what I regard as nonsensical. (You must feel safe.)

I had a painful experience that I wished to speak about at the TRC. I was unable to work for a period of seven months, so for seven months I had no income.

You must have realised that I have moved house from C. to where I live now. It was because of the bad experience that I decided to go and start a new life somewhere. I was not running away from the place I so love, but because every time I moved around the place, I could sense that this is where my life nearly ended.

Concerning the TRC, my wife and I received a letter which was sent to invite us to appear before the TRC. We went to fill in the forms and made out statements. It was our turn to talk and I spoke on our behalf. I cannot give details about what I said as I told you that my memory does not serve me very well.

**Interviewer:** *What was it like to speak at the TRC?*

**Subject 5:** I knew then who I was dealing with. This felt good, since my Supreme Court appearance on a Criminal Charge against the killer that had failed. I felt so good, very good in such a way that I said all I wanted to say without any fear. My Supreme Court statement could not contain every detail, as they were dealing more with what they wanted to present for the state to succeed. They selected (they know what) the truth from lies. However, at the TRC I described all the details as they unfolded. I enjoyed talking at the TRC.

I spoke the truth, and felt that the man who wanted me dead felt threatened. I could feel his presence at the hearings. I had known the man a long time as a political brother because we were members of the same party until I decided to move on. I think that my move to join another party gave him the motive to do what he did with some conviction. This is because when I was in the same party with him, he was insecure, but he had no way of trying to harm or kill me.

**Interviewer:** *How has your life changed since you spoke at the TRC?*

**Subject 5:** The fact that I spoke at the TRC does not stop me from wanting to see proper justice done. I am now working towards re-opening the case. I went to the TRC to take this further. I have been to the police where my files and statements are kept and have informed them of my intention to take my case further. This I am doing because we were promised by the Government that the cases will be re-opened. I am excited and happy because I am doing something about my case.

My life has changed because I have accepted what is happening as a reality. That I limp now is just a reminder that somebody wanted to kill me. I am happy that I am doing something about the whole matter.

Has the TRC changed my life? Yes, I am healthy except for the limp. Mentally I am sound, although I have developed emotions and mind memory lapses. It is a reality. Maybe I need help in terms of treatment? I need psychiatric treatment and counselling because of my poor



memory. It is remarkable that this whole thing has not affected my mental judgement and authority as far as my work is concerned. It still means that I need treatment.

**Subject Six: Black Female, mid forties, 14 September 1998.**

My life was above average before the death of my husband. He provided everything that I wanted. When he died life became unbearable. Before I went to the TRC I had a number of questions I asked myself, like why did they kill him and who killed him? Rumours were that he was a political victim – I only learned of the reasons when I went to the Supreme Court in Pietermaritzburg on a Murder Case.

During those days (after his death) I received phone calls, threatening to come and kill me and all my family. At some stage, one day four strangers came to my business. They behaved and acted strangely, asking questions from my staff that were also strange. One of my staffers phoned K. Police Station to report these strange men, and the police came and arrested them. To this day I have never heard what happened to them, also who they were and what they were after. All this happened before the judgement was passed on the murder charge.

I was traumatised until I was called before the TRC.

I must mention also that the murderer was released before I appeared before the TRC. He sent messages, insulting me. One day I picked up the phone and heard that the murderer is out of jail, pity me because I thought that he would rot in jail, continues the telephone message.

I insulted the caller and told her what I thought of them together with her Master. She reframed from calling. My life and health deteriorated very badly.

Before the TRC sitting I had a visit from a young girl who said she was from the TRC, and she came to ask me and my family some questions. We gave her all the statements dating back to the 9<sup>th</sup> May 1996. On the 10<sup>th</sup> May I went to the Jewish Hall, Durban, where after two other people had testified, I was then called.

I requested that my son read the statements that we, as family, had prepared because I felt that I had no confidence in myself. One most important issue was that my husband was a

community leader and was loved by the entire community. Strangely enough he received threatening calls saying that he would be killed.

Two young girls came to tell my husband that he must leave the country to save himself from dying. All this was contained in the statement that was read at the TRC.

As I started talking my vision was focused like I was reliving the day of the murder. I was then taken to the psychologist. At this point I am still not sure whether I finished the statement or not because I was hysterical and started crying.

On question time, I could not remember where I had started because everything seemed horrifying; it was horrible. My last born baby was 5 years of age. It was frightening. My baby wrote a letter asking for teddy bears from Father Christmas because hers had passed away. Until now she is not the baby she was, she needs help, she needs therapy. I need it as well. The whole family needs therapy. In short, all six of us need help, therapy.

It did not only end there. After my appearance at the TRC we did not (could not) sleep at home. We returned home after giving evidence at the TRC and were told that we should all be eliminated because the evidence I gave could return some people to jail.

Life continued to be intolerable. This new event was reported to the TRC which arranged that I and my family should leave C, and Natal and to get sanctuary somewhere.

I and the other victims of political violence, who had appeared before the TRC were treated like lunatics by the doctors we were referred to by the TRC. We would have preferred that the TRC had special psychiatrist (even now) who would deal with the TRC cases only.

As for my child, she is intelligent but she feels that life is not worth it anymore because her father is not here anymore. She does not sleep well now. At some stage she even asked me why the people who killed her father do not come and kill her so that they could be with their father, next to God. She is doing well at school, but I don't see a bright future for her if she does not get help soon.

**Subject Seven: Black Female, early fifties, 14 October 1998.**

We came from Richmond at a place named G. We woke up one morning and our house in G. was on fire. Our personal possessions were stolen as well as our livestock. We fled the area without anything. We did not know where we were going to. We landed in Pinetown which is near to where my husband is now employed. He spoke to his colleague about our plight and they provided us with the place.

When we heard about the TRC, we approached their Pinetown offices where we made statements. We were not given a chance to appear before the commission because we must have applied late and fell within categories that were declared not very serious.

I have been given forms for reparation which I have filled in as promised. I have landed within the 7 000 Victims for Reparation.

(Not able to continue due to emotional distress.)

**Subject Eight: Black Female, mid fifties, 28 October 1998**

Before I went to speak at the TRC I had a pain since the death of my husband. I had questions that I could not answer. Even the children wanted to know. I then went to the TRC.

I did not have expectations at the TRC but thought that the statement that I had made to the clerks would be considered and a ruling made. I said I had no clue but when it was my turn to speak I started recalling the day my husband was shot. He had received calls that were not nice to hear but he never told me what it was all about.

He was sitting with my ten-year-old boy in the car. I was in the room upstairs when I heard loud bangs outside and went to the window and peeped. I saw my son holding my husband and crying. I went down the stairs, out to the car where I heard my son saying "Please dad, talk to me, I am your son". Across the road my daughter was standing still looking towards our house. I was told that she had been standing there for more than ten minutes, a fifteen-year-old girl had messed herself with urine and excretion and looking dazed.

I told the TRC all that I saw on that day. The pain kept on and I fell on the floor. Nothing mattered, I cursed God for punishing me the way he did. Why me? I recall the time I woke up and went back to talk. I felt some relief after speaking.

Even more relieved when I learned who killed my husband. Listening to perpetrators and seeing them brought relief, at least I know some of the people that are involved in this. One of the perpetrators told the TRC that they (the perpetrators) were trained at C. and were instructed by a captain by K. Station to kill my husband. Only two of them appeared before the Commission. Where are the others?

The captain referred to is know holding a very high rank in the police force and is based at U., the other two are not known except that it is rumoured that one is dead.

After they gave their statements, the TRC started investigations into the accomplices in September 1997. To our surprise they were pardoned. I can't believe that a man confesses and they still acquit him. We expected justice. I am angry that they just pardoned them. The prosecutor hung his head. I went to the prosecutor and said: "Don't worry, they will hang in heaven."

I want to appeal to the Minister of Justice. After all the threats we had suffered from them it is unfair that they were then acquitted. Our lawyer blamed us for not laying a charge against him in the Supreme Court.

The commander of the hit squad came to us at the TRC Amnesty Hearing and shook our hands and asked for forgiveness. Since they personally asked us for forgiveness, I said I forgive them as long as they acknowledge the truth. If the people ask you, you have to forgive. Only you can forgive, the courts can't forgive. They must still ask for forgiveness from God.

Since I'd forgiven when they asked, I am relieved. I now have peace in my heart. I can walk free, and he is now free to walk. We haven't been threatened since the Amnesty Hearing at the Christian Centre in Durban in August 1998.

There is the good that the TRC has brought up, that to make us talk about the pain but the bad part is, I will not be completely healed if the remaining members are not brought before the law. I want to know them all. I need to see their faces so that I can know and tell my children who they are and why they killed my husband.

The killing happened in 1988 but to this day my son has sleepless nights. He sleeps awaking and wanting to run away from the killers. It is like he sees them coming.

My life before the TRC was normal. I have now developed many illnesses like hypertension, sugar diabetes, I cannot any longer think straight. I am also forgetful.

My husband used to help the old, poor and destitute. He buried the poor out of care. He was a good father and husband. Life was good. I had three businesses, two butcheries and a grocery shop.

When my husband died I received threatening calls and I abandoned all the business from fear of the unknown faces. I still received these calls. I reported to the police at K. Police Station and nothing to this day has been done to bring the callers to book.

My life has gone down the drain because of threats I receive. I have reported the matter to the C. Police and have gone to collect the murder (docket) file from K. Police. The Captain who collected my file from K. Police Station has since phoned to say that he cannot continue the investigation because he has been deployed to Richmond.

I said before that the TRC had done good and bad. One of the bad things is that they have now neglected us. The killers that were not brought before the TRC are roaming the streets, we do not know them, they might victimise us for appearing before the TRC.

The TRC is not following up on us who have testified before it, to check how we are keeping and coping with life after having said it all. I feel that the healing is not happening because of the fear. The wounds are not healing. The feeling of emptiness in me makes me sad. When I think of a solution I cannot get any help.

It would have been better if they did not even start the process because I feel very hurt as of now. The psychologist we consulted could not help because people who have testified before the TRC are looked upon as mad. This hurts a lot.

I am tired now, I may need to give you a copy of the statement I made at the TRC for you to continue with your interview. Your interview is making me feel good because I trust you are understanding me. Please go on and help others like me, God be with you.

**Subjects Nine & Ten (co-interviewed): Black Females, late forties, 12 December 1998.**

**Interviewer:** *How has the TRC affected you?*

**Subject 9:** It has not helped us. Mr M. wanted to speak all of the truth, but his lawyers stopped him. We spoke to his lawyer, to ask his lawyer to please let him speak the whole truth.

How can we forgive and forget if the perpetrator hasn't said sorry? If he said sorry or expressed regret, then even if it couldn't give us our husbands back, at least we could forgive.

This Mr M. had pointed out our houses to the hitmen. He confessed that he showed them the houses. He should have said who did the killing. However his evidence bore no fruit because there was not enough evidence to convict him.

It was disheartening to hear that the killers treated him like nothing. When Mr M. wanted to tell the whole truth, his lawyers said "no it's not relevant".

I just left the TRC amnesty hearings as I couldn't speak any more. The commissioners tried to intervene, but couldn't force Mr M. to speak.

The TRC then closed the case. We expected the TRC to investigate further and find out the truth. But nothing happened.

The TRC as a whole wasn't a bad thing overall. They tried but failed overall. What they wanted to do was good, but the lawyers blocked it. We wanted to hear the truth, but the lawyers intervened. If we'd heard the truth we'd feel better.

If he'd told the truth with regret, I would try to forgive and not proceed with prosecution. Putting the person in jail wouldn't bring my husband back, so if he had some regret I'd have

forgiven him. I might only have sought compensation. Now I seek retribution and compensation.

**Interviewer:** *I am sorry that I did not do more myself during the period of apartheid.*

**Subject 10:** *(Speaks for the first time.)* My late husband was a teacher in a school under the K. Government. He exposed this school as unofficial since it should have been under the white provincial government. The warlord wanted our community to fall under the K. Government. So he tried to kill our husbands.

My husband's death was very traumatic. It doesn't heal. They shot him in our house. Your life changes overnight. The TRC could have helped by establishing the truth, and forcing perpetrators to show remorse, for us to forgive.

On TV we saw perpetrators and victims actually asking for forgiveness, and embracing each other to reconcile. Why didn't this happen with us? Why couldn't Mr M. be allowed to tell the truth? Then we could at least start to forgive.

After my husband's death I did flower arranging which helped a lot. Now I can sleep at last. My mind is clear but very sad.

The TRC asked if I was ever compensated. Only the Red Cross tried to help us and treated us as human beings. I feel that I should be compensated. Was there only reparation allocated to C. Township?

Please try to find out if anything was allocated to C. Township and the widows who were left. Was there an independent source who tried to compensate C. Township? I received nothing, and would be pained if this was the case and I was left out.

**Subject Eleven: Black Male, late fifties, 12 December 1998.**

I have been a property and business consultant from 1956 to the present. I have always had pressure at work to support my family.

I have a third wife and children from my first and second wives. My children are all grown up.

After the shootings on the 21<sup>st</sup> February 1998 I was in hospital for seven months and thus developed debts which increased my pressure. However, I managed to clear the debts due to the support of my wife. She paid the rent and drove me around.

I suffer memory lapses. They began with the shootings, and I couldn't remember details of my life. For example, in hospital I forgot that I had lost my house. They had burnt my house. When it came time to leave hospital I forgot again that they had burnt my house, and I had lost all my clothes and possessions.

I suffer with flashbacks. Even now I wake up at the time that they came for me (12h00) and burnt my house.

After speaking at the TRC I don't remember if I went to see that psychiatrist. Yes, I went a long time ago to K. hospital to see a psychiatrist.

Immediately after the TRC I was given the impression that we would go to a psychologist. They said they would come back to us.

I have never dreamed about the shooting. I don't think about it. Rather I think of the loss of money that the shooting actually caused me.

Every night I get up at that time of the shooting, even though I moved houses two years after the burning.

I avoid the place of my original house where I was shot.

I have memory impairment after the trauma, although my concentration is still fine. I get depressed when my business battles. However I never drink when I get depressed. I just enjoy wine after dinner, not because I'm depressed. "I never drink when depressed."

**Subject Twelve: Black Female, late forties, 4 January 1999.**

I was excited at first about the thought of speaking at the TRC.

Speaking took us back to the tragedy where we lost our dear ones. When we spoke we felt we couldn't carry on. We broke down and couldn't speak. Fortunately I had my son and he read my statement.

Then they asked us questions. I couldn't take it. The questions were so hurtful, not that they tried to hurt us, but the questions went deep.

When I spoke I couldn't think of forgiving. The people who killed my son weren't there to hear my suffering. Forgiving came later at the Amnesty Hearing.

After speaking we were taken to see a psychologist. Then we were given letters to refer us to a psychologist. We didn't want to be seen as patients.

We went to see Dr P. He treated us well, and admitted Ms M. to hospital when she broke down.

However we were taken out of the province by the TRC, to a safe place, as we were threatened.

Then when we came back we were told to see a unit at a black hospital. At K. Hospital they sent us away and we were not treated from 05h00 to 17h00. We felt more abused.

The TRC told us that the TRC couldn't pay for private treatment.

We were given more letters to see a black unit, but have refused.

If I can save the money I will go back to see Dr P.

I am worried about my son and daughter who saw the murder of their father.

My daughter is suicidal. She doesn't want to stay in our home. She is reminded of her father's loss.

She is moody and emotional. She blames me and says if her father was alive, we would live in a better place.

She left home at the start of December holidays and only phoned yesterday to say where she is. She will come back for schooling in matric.

We went twice to see Dr M. at the TRC office who said she would help us to see a therapist immediately and not wait all day. But she left the TRC.