

***A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO FAMILIES  
VICTIMIZED BY POLITICAL VIOLENCE***

by

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TITLE : A phenomenological approach to families victimized by political violence

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### Abstract

The focus of this study is to establish how victimization through violence has affected the families who are interviewed. The purpose is to describe how the family's world has changed in different moments during the political strife in South Africa. The different contexts or moments are those of political inactivity, the struggle years, the period after the struggle when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was constituted and the new world order in which the families continue with their lives. Using a phenomenological approach, the experiences of families subjected to different forms of political violence, such as disappearances of victims, torture in detention and death in detention, are discussed.

The literature review on violence in the South African context situates any discourse which occurred within the broader social, historical and political context. Systems Theory, Social Identity Theory and an Integrated Theory of Political Violence are used as theoretical perspectives in understanding the interconnectedness between violence which affected the families in the present study and the whole society.

The qualitative research interview method postulated by Kvale (1996) has been used to collect data from the families. This procedure has enabled the researcher to study the data as it emerged thus allowing an understanding of the essential meanings implicit in the participants' descriptions of their experiences. The data consists of audio taped interviews conducted with twenty-two members from ten families. This resulted in twenty-two protocols which were

transcribed and analysed. The analysis of the protocols, though used differently from the situated structure identified by Wertz (1983), brought essential themes common to all participants.

The research findings reveal themes which demonstrate that experiences of the families subjected to political violence had an impact on their lives. They remember living routinely before the struggle against the apartheid structures. This is remembered as a very long time. The struggle years brought disintegration of the family unit as people fled their homes into exile. Others disappeared, were detained, tortured and died in prison. The relationship between the families and their children was that of concern, as parents discouraged their children to participate in the political activities. The effects of violence culminated in hardship for many families as they experienced an absence of a helpful community, alienation from political organizations, and distrust of the State during the time that missing family members could not be traced by the security police. This distrust also existed among the communities who were experiencing suffering through incidents of black on black violence.

The introduction of the TRC, as a major theme with sub-themes of healing and forgiveness, is perceived positively by these families. At last, they feel that through this process their suffering of loss of their children, husbands and wives is acknowledged. However, there are divergent opinions about this acknowledgement, as research findings point to an incomplete sense of individual healing for these families though they have told their stories of pain and suffering. This is a controversial issue which needs further research to explicate if individual experience of the victim is perceived to be similar to the collective experience of the broader community. The performance of rituals and memories on behalf of their dead fulfills an important healing role for the families. There is ambivalence about forgiveness for many families as they feel that perpetrators who seek amnesty have not made full disclosures about their activities.

There is polarization that surfaces between the present government and the families who testified with regard to reparation which was included as a clause in the TRC process. The families in the present study perceive that in order to continue with the new world order, they have to be compensated for their suffering. Further research should investigate if reparations to individuals who testified before the TRC would be healing, before implementing processes that would heal the whole nation.

TITEL : 'n Fenomenologiese benadering tot families wat onderworpe was aan politieke geweld

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### Opsomming

Die fokus van hierdie ondersoek is om te bepaal hoe viktimisasie deur geweld die families waarmee onderhoude gevoer is, beïnvloed het. Die doel is om te beskryf hoe die betrokke families se wêreld tydens verskillende momente gedurende die politieke stryd in Suid-Afrika verander het. Die verskillende kontekste, of momente is dié voor aktiewe politieke betrokkenheid, die strydjare, die periode na die stryd waartydens die Waarheid-en-Versoeningskommissie (WVK) gekonstitueer is, en die nuwe wêreldorde waarbinne die families voortgaan met hul lewens. Met behulp van 'n fenomenologiese benadering word die ervaringe van families onderworpe aan verskillende vorme politieke geweld, soos die verdwyning van slagoffers, marteling en dood in aanhouding, bespreek.

Die literatuuroorsig rakende geweld binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks plaas enige diskoers wat plaasgevind het binne die breër sosiale, historiese en politieke konteks. Sistemiese Teorie, Sosiale Identiteitsteorie en n' Integrasieteorie van Politieke Geweld word gebruik as teoretiese perspektiewe in die ondersoek na die onderliggende verband tussen geweld wat die families in hierdie ondersoek geraak het en dié van die breër samelewing.

Die kwalitatiewe navorsingsonderhoud voorgestel deur Kvale (1996) is gebruik om inligting van die families te verkry. Hierdie prosedure het die navorser in staat gestel om die data te bestudeer soos dit verkry word en dra dus by tot begrip van essensiële betekenis ingesluit in die betrokke persone se beskrywings van hul ervarings. Die data in hierdie ondersoek bestaan uit die onderhoude wat met altesaam twee en twintig familielede uit die tien families gevoer is met behulp van 'n videokassetopnemer. Hieruit is twee en twintig protokolle getranskribeer en geanaliseer. Die analise van die protokolle, alhoewel verskillend benader van die voorgestelde struktuur soos geïdentifiseer deur Wertz (1983), dui op belangrike temas wat alle deelnemers in gemeen het.

Die navorsingsbevindinge onthul temas, wat demonstreer dat die ervaringe van die families wat onderworpe was aan politieke geweld, 'n impak op hul lewens gemaak het. Hulle herroep 'n geroetineerde lewe voor die stryd teen die apartheidstruktuur. Dit word onthou as 'n baie lang tydperk. Die strydjare het die disintegrasië van familie-eenhede ingehou aangesien mense hul huise verlaat het en in ballingskap gaan woon het. Andere het verdwyn, is aangehou en gemartel in tronke, gevolg deur dood in aanhouding. Die verhouding tussen die familie en hul kinders was een van kommer, waartydens ouers hul kinders afgeraai het teen deelname aan politieke aktiwiteite. Die geweld het gelei tot ontberinge vir baie families, soos die afwesigheid van 'n ondersteunende gemeenskap, vervreemding van politieke organisasies, en wantroue in die staat gedurende die betrokke tyd, aangesien vermiste familielede nie deur die veiligheidspolisie opgespoor kon word nie. Hierdie wantroue het ook bestaan binne gemeenskappe wat gelyk het onder voorvalle van swart-teen-swart geweld.

Die instelling van die WVK as 'n hooftema met die subtemas van genesing en vergifnis, is as positief ervaar deur hierdie families. Uiteindelik voel hulle dat hierdie proses help om hul lyding, met betrekking tot die verlies van hul kinders, eggenote, te erken. Tog is daar uiteenlopende opinies oor hierdie erkenning soos die navorsingsbevindinge ook wys op 'n onvoltooide gevoel van individuele genesing vir hierdie families, alhoewel hulle hul stories van pyn en lyding vertel het. Hierdie is 'n kontroversiële kwessie, wat verdere navorsing verg om vas te stel of individuele ervaringe dieselfde is as die kollektiewe ervaring van die breër samelewing. Die verrigting van rituele en herinneringe aan afgestorwenes vervul 'n belangrike genesingsrol vir die families. Daar bestaan ambivalensie rondom vergifnis vir baie families, aangesien hulle voel dat skuldiges wat aansoek gedoen het om amnestie nie volledige onthulling oor hul bedryghede gemaak het nie.

Daar bestaan 'n tweespalt tussen die huidige regering en die families wat getuig het rakende kompensasië, soos ingesluit as 'n klousule in die WVK-proses. Die families in hierdie ondersoek dring daarop aan dat hulle vergoed moet word vir hul lyding, sodat hulle kan voortgaan met hul lewens in die nuwe wêreldorde. Verdere navorsing behoort ondersoek in te stel of kompensasië van individue wat voor die WVK getuig het genesend blyk te wees voor implementering van prosesse vir genesing van die nasie as geheel.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

- 2.1. The research background
- 2.2. The research objectives

## CHAPTER THREE

### PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES ON VIOLENCE AND ITS REPAIR

- 3.1. The Freud & Piaget's perspectives
- 3.2. Aggression versus violence
- 3.3. Subsequent theories on violence
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