

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

1.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

This study was motivated as a result of my observations during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission sessions. As part of national healing process, the TRC was constitutionally established by the government in 1995. The institution of this commission emerged as the government's inspired need toward the healing and the reconciliation among the people of South Africa after the gross violation of human rights during the years of apartheid. As a result of active participation in providing counselling to the victims and families who testified during the TRC sessions, it became necessary to conduct research on their experiences. The research enquiry is based on effects of the historical process of apartheid amongst the survivors of political violence. The present study aims to investigate victimization by critically evaluating and describing the lived experiences of those families who were subjected to political violence. The present study used qualitative research interviews in order to describe the experiences reported by the families. The chapters are as follows:

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One: introduces the rationale behind undertaking this study as the author describes the structure of this thesis.

Chapter Two: introduces the reader to the literature on different forms of violence in South Africa and its implications on families. An overview of how political violence caused disruption and instability amongst family members is discussed. It is also the author's contention that the literature on the concept and definition of the family is not static. In tracing the literature it becomes necessary to punctuate the context in order to indicate how the concept is defined differently over time.

- Chapter Three:** describes the theoretical considerations on violence and reviews research conducted in this area while situating the context of violence within a perspective which includes systems' theory, social identity theory and an integrated theory of political violence. The families in the present study, though micro-systemic in nature, are part of the larger whole, the macro-system. The antagonistic attitude of the families towards the apartheid regime brings to the fore how regulation of the apartheid laws brings changes to the life world of the family. In addition, the experience of these regulations by different groups in South Africa is manifested in social categorization. The social identity theory further explicates the significance of this categorization and the results of the intergroup conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed.
- Chapter Four:** explicates the method which is employed in conducting the study. This explains why the phenomenological approach and the use of a qualitative research interview is perceived as appropriate method for generating data in this study. The presentation of protocol analysis by using three families for ideographic interpretation in this chapter is intended to reveal thematically what is involved in the experience of being victimized.
- Chapter Five:** expands and deepens the understanding of the themes that emerge from the analysis and discusses implications of these themes for the lives of family and family members, the common themes that emerge from the extended discussions of the individual families' interviews and the impact of these on the life world of the family.
- Chapter Six:** summarizes the implications of the present study by pondering issues such as reconciliation, forgiveness and national versus individual healing, as they emerge during the interviews with participants. Limitations of the research are discussed while recommendations for further research are also made.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION TO THE LITERATURE ON VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 LITERATURE SURVEY ON VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is essential that any discourse in this country be situated within the broader social, historical and political context. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss comprehensively the history and socio-political dynamics of South Africa. Therefore the aim is to provide a broad overview of the context out of which the present study of victimization of families emerges. In 1948 the National Party came into power and the era of apartheid began. Although discrimination on the basis of race had been practised for decades, it was with apartheid and its cornerstone, the Population Registration Act of 1950, that racial separation and discrimination became enshrined in law in South Africa. Along with the classification of people in different groups also came the segregation of resources, with "whites" (or people of European descent) receiving disproportionately more than people of other races, and "Blacks" (or people of African descent) receiving the least. In effect what this meant was gross disparities in access to adequate land, housing, education, health care, welfare, employment and so on.

Resistance to minority domination and protest against the oppressive legislation of apartheid by the disenfranchised black majority were met by further repression from the State. Even prior to the events of Sharpeville in 1960, black uprisings in organised forms of protests had become frequent. This culminated in the 1970's with the youth protesting against "Bantu Education", thus creating contending forces which became sharply polarized. Riots during 1976, began in Soweto, and rapidly spread into other townships. The polarization emerged as the State increased the reach of its coercive and repressive powers. The opposition responded with a mood of greater determination than ever before (Stadler,1987). Almost invariably the government reacted to that opposition by unleashing more violence. According to Cock (1990), capital punishment, death squads accompanied by disappearances and assassinations, legal police killings, detention without trial, torture, arson and armed attacks were some of the many forms of violence that the State used to subdue opposition by blacks.

Minnaar (1992b) argues that in South Africa we should look at the socio-political conditions which existed during the political upheaval. For instance, these conditions included a lack of formal control and the presence of alternative structures in shanty towns. In most of these shanty towns there were "kangaroo courts" or "peoples courts" (Scheper-Hughes 1994), where popular justice was practised in opposition to formal (that is State-recognised) justice. These conditions promoted the escalation and legitimisation of violence where instigators were often not brought to book. Even though such violence occurs variously according to its context, its impacts are universal.

Mehlwana (1996) mentions that one can compare the impacts of political violence in South Africa with that in other states in Africa. An example is the way in which political violence has brought genocide to the tiny state of Rwanda. Hundreds of thousands of peoples' lives were lost in what has been described as the most violent civil conflict in Africa (Drum, July 1994). To date, thousands of people have fled their homes and taken refuge in neighbouring African countries (mainly Uganda, Burundi and Sudan). The political genocide will, without a doubt, leave a serious impact on the structure of such families (Glanz & Spiegel, 1996).

Chikane (1987:344) wrote that, " the most tragic reflection of the war situation in which South Africa finds itself is that it faces the years to come with children who have been socialized to find violence completely acceptable and human life cheap". This is not only true for South Africa, but applicable in most social situations where such forms of violence occur.

Although violence in South Africa had become institutionalized (or became the norm, the so-called culture of violence) the government in February 1990, announced its intention to dismantle apartheid. Gradually, political prisoners were released and apartheid legislation repealed as a process of negotiation towards a political settlement in South Africa was undertaken. During this spasmodic negotiation process violence increased further. According to Kimaryo (1993), in 1992 alone almost 3,500 people were killed in political violence. This number exceeds that of people killed in over 20 years of conflict in Northern Ireland (Harbison and Harbison, 1980, in Garmezy & Rutter, 1985). Following an agreement being reached on an interim constitution and in the months preceding the country's first democratic elections, threats of civil war from various groups were rife. On the 31st March 1994, a state of emergency was declared in KwaZulu-Natal. The Natal Witness (18 May 1994) reported that 337 people were killed in that province in April 1994. Although the expectations were that the levels of violence would abate, since the apartheid legislation was truly buried, the violence took another

turn as crime-related incidents increased.

The extent and dimensions of violence in South Africa are well-known and continue to be extensively researched. A review of all local research would be a project on its own. Some of the well-known studies include the effects of political violence on children (Dawes, 1990), the experience of having one's house attacked and bombed (Cleaver, 1988) and Turton, Straker and Moosa's (1991) work on the experiences of violence by township youths. The task at hand is to study families who were subjected to political violence and their experience of being victimized.

2.2 LITERATURE ON STUDIES OF VIOLENCE AND THE FAMILY

The most recent literature (McKendrick & Senoamadi, 1996, Mehlwana, 1996, Ross, 1996) on violence and the family (in Glanz & Spiegel, 1996) provides information with regard to the impact of violence on squatter camp families, effects of domestic violence and political violence on informal settlements. There is a dearth of research with regard to how these changes affect the life world of the family. Although this is so, most research seems to look at the changes that occur in the family through the incidents or experiences that have affected children, as will be discussed below.

Globally there are many studies that have been conducted on children exposed to violence (Ziv & Israeli, 1973, Lyons, 1971 & 1979). Reports of these studies showed that these children generally showed no remarkable or longstanding distress. Some arguments support the view that children's resilience was due to their active participation as well as their social support network during these violent times. It would appear as if when a community fails to protect children, a more profound relationship between exposure and distress emerges. Raviv and Klingman (1983) discovered that Israeli children who were held hostage in an incident in which twenty two were killed, showed symptoms of disturbances up to two years later. Both studies in South America (Gibson, 1983) and in South Africa (Swartz & Levett, 1989) discovered that children of detained parents or those of parents who fled into exile experienced emotional disturbances. In addition, studies in Northern Ireland showed that youngsters suffer more than adults. Fraser (1973) confirmed that the reaction of children rests very much on the perception of threat by significant adults in their lives, that is, parents and teachers. McWhitier (1983) documented the effects of bombing and terrorist acts on children.

Before the democratic elections of 1994 in South Africa, the South African State was viewed as having committed systematic violence against the institution of the family among blacks (Reynolds, 1995). Her findings on the effects of the State violence against the family included disruption of ties between children and adults, and those between children and children alike. Most political activists' relations within their families were deeply affected by this violence.

Most research conducted in South Africa (Swartz & Levett, 1989, Seedat, Cloete & Shochet, 1988) during this time focussed on violence which accompanied the political acts of resistance to apartheid on the one hand, and the attempts made by the State and its allies to contain and eliminate this resistance on the other hand.

Researchers (Turton, Straker & Moosa, 1991) moved beyond the status quo mentioned above as they investigated the experiences of violence on cohorts of township youths. These authors confirmed one of the limitations of their study as neglecting to look at the experiences of adults or of family relationships in the context of violence because of their assumption that children are not very different from adults regarding the stress of violence. Dawes (1989) also showed that there was a significant relationship between the post traumatic stress disorders in mothers and the presence of multiple stress symptoms in children exposed to political violence.

Haysom (1986) reports that during 1985, violence and conflict in South Africa increased rapidly. It appears to have started years earlier when protests in black townships against apartheid escalated. He goes on to say that the security forces responded very severely. In the ensuing unrest many people died. During 1985 various regional right wing vigilante groups had been formed. The targets for these vigilantes were members or leaders of groups who resisted apartheid. Haysom (1986) goes on to say that the vigilantes believed that they were supported by the police and in some cases it was alleged that they did in fact receive police support. The vigilantes sought out people whom they considered to be trouble makers. Haysom (1986:2) further points out that in South Africa the term "vigilante is associated with potentially murderous gangs, intent on intimidating, injuring or killing anti-apartheid activists".

School pupils began boycotting schools in protest against inadequate education at about the same time that the vigilante groups appeared. This too resulted in conflict and in deaths. In major urban areas administrative structures lost their power and control. The police and security forces reinforced their coercive activities. Thousands of people were detained under laws of public safety or State security. Vigilante activity was backed by the town councils who

opposed groups who threatened these councils. In this way vigilante and official agencies' interests were served (Haysom, 1986).

Vigilante activity included house burnings and beatings of people. Thus the position was reached that right wing vigilantes were attacking activists against the apartheid system while at the same time, the houses of persons who were perceived to co-operate with the system were attacked by left wing activists. Many anti-apartheid activists were detained and tortured in prison. Some of them disappeared and were later discovered to have died in prison, as their names surfaced in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Boraine, 1995).

The situation in the townships was highly complex. The outline given here does not purport to cover all eventualities, but reflects that the family relationships during these times were disrupted in some way or other. It is within this context that torture in detention and abduction or disappearance, and the subsequent deaths in detention of activists described in this study took place. The study does not seek to elucidate the political struggle but only to describe the lived experiences of victimization by families.

As it can be deduced from the above discussions, theorists or researchers arrived at similar findings regarding the individuals' or childrens' experiences of violence but there is a lack of descriptive work of the experiences of violence and its effects on family relationships, especially those families who have been subjected to political violence. Leeb (1988:10) has made the following comments about the family: "As a nation we purport to care about that great god, the family". She mentions that the disruption of family life in the townships cannot be ignored, as families who were forced to flee from their own homes because of violence, find themselves in a state of dissolution. Members of the family become disorientated because their roles lose definitions, separation is often necessary and family intimacy is no longer possible. Very often one or more members of the family have been killed and there is no chance for members of the family to mourn together.

The following vignettes will illustrate what Leeb (1988) refers to:

One family forced to flee because a brother had been killed in mistaken identity for the father was lucky enough to relocate, temporarily, in a house where they could be together. The father was depressed, because, although he was still a bread-winner he had lost his role as the head of the family. Part of this desperation were his five children who had to leave school. They were confined, unable to make a noise because of fear of drawing attention to the situation and were unhappy.

Another family, with children ranging from three years to seventeen years old were faced with the same problem. The father had been shot, one of the children wounded and the teenage son was trying to be the head of the household. The mother was strong and was coping by playing her role no matter where she was but she was having to contend with children who were fairly disturbed.

The above anecdotes are two of hundreds. Research has isolated psychological effects of men, who lose their self esteem, become depressed or start drinking heavily due to these circumstances, and children (Brehm, 1966) who react with depression followed by aggression (Leeb, 1988). This suggests a lack of published research on the experiences of the family I mentioned previously, as the experiences within the family are made known according to how the man or husband, child or wife experienced violence separately rather than as a family unit. It is in the light of this lack of information that I undertook to investigate this phenomenon of lived experiences of families who were subjected to political violence.

It can also be discerned from these anecdotes that these families have experienced victimization which is related to social change. According to Cleaver (1988 :76), "a victim is anyone who suffers either as a result of a ruthless design or accidentally". It would appear that the aim of the victimizers during this period was to curtail socio-political activities of the victims.

Scholars like Bernades (1985b, 1988 and Luepnitz, 1988) highlight a very important dilemma about the the definition of the family. They postulate that the term "family" is widely used as though it represents a "natural" and universal concrete entity, and yet there is increasing recognition that the boundaries of what constitutes a family are more difficult to define (Soal,1996). Bernades (1985b) further refers to the fact that the term "family" could be used in different contexts to mean different things, for example, an isolated domestic unit, members of the extended kin network, even perhaps some image of solidarity. Hoffmann (1990), has pointed out that definitions of the family are value-based and moreover, will differ according to whether structure, household or function is selected as the central concept. In reality, most empirical researchers, as Lee (1987 in Viljoen, 1987:7) claims, have had to settle for a pragmatic, operational definition of the family as " a group of co-resident kin, those who share a household".

For the purpose of this study, the family was defined as the extended family structure which links a wider circle of people who are related by blood or marriage in a network of relatives who normally identify with and care for one another. Although African society and culture has been

affected in many ways through acculturation, it is not uncommon to find a household with parents, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles and nephews or nieces interrelated by many mutual obligations of support and help.

This chapter surveyed the context of violence and its impact on families. The implications point to a deeper understanding of the nature of political violence, how it occurred, and the families' response to the violence. The following chapter will focus on theoretical perspectives on violence.