

**RE-STORYING XENOPHOBIA IN SOUTH AFRICA:  
A POSTFOUNDATIONAL, NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF  
UBUNTU IN THE EASTERN CAPE**

BY

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Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.*

## Declaration

I, John Leslie Benjamin Eliastam declare that RE-STORYING XENOPHOBIA IN SOUTH AFRICA: A POSTFOUNDATIONAL, NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF UBUNTU IN THE EASTERN CAPE, which I hereby submit for the degree Philosophiae Doctor at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed at East London on 30 August 2015

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## Abstract

South African communities have experienced levels of antipathy towards foreign migrants since the transition to democracy in 1994. This incipient hostility erupted into widespread violence in May 2008, where 62 foreign nationals were killed, around 700 injured, and an estimated 35 000 foreigners were driven from their homes. What has been termed xenophobia has simmered in communities around South Africa since then, occasionally escalating to levels where it threatens to approach the scale of the 2008 violence, such as the violence against foreigners that occurred in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in January and April of 2015 respectively.

Most studies that explore xenophobia in South Africa focus on offering explanations for the eruption of overt violence against foreigners and identifying specific triggers for this violence. A reified notion of xenophobia is taken for granted and the violence itself is problematised rather than the construction of meaning that precedes it. While the label of xenophobia may provide an accurate description of the symptoms of this social malaise, there are risks that it may obscure the problems that lie behind the violence or over-simplify them.

This study proceeded from a postfoundational, social constructionist epistemology, and utilised a Narrative research approach to listen to the stories of people living in a rural and an urban community in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa between 2013 and 2015. The aim of the research was to understand how meaning was being constructed with regard to foreigners in order to develop insights into possibilities for shaping the creation of new meaning. Stories from within the context were listened to, described, and then interpretations were made and developed with co-researchers. These stories were explored in order to discover how they reflected dominant Discourses in South Africa, and how these Discourses were being harnessed in leadership discourse, the media, and in people's stories to produce certain meanings in relation to foreigners. Of the various discourses that exist, I was particularly curious about the role that *ubuntu*, a traditional African social value, was playing in shaping social relationships within this context. *Ubuntu* was frequently mentioned in public discourse as a solution to the violence, along with the argument that the violence indicated a lack of *ubuntu*.

A transversal interdisciplinary conversation was initiated by asking scholars from the fields of Political Science, Psychology, and Organisational Psychology to reflect on a transcript of

one of the interviews. This is followed by an interdisciplinary literature review. Insights on prejudice from Social Psychology, on conflict from Organisational Psychology, and the post-Marxist political theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe offer valuable perspectives on the violence against foreigners in South Africa.

Meaning with regard to foreigners was produced through the confluence of multiple stories, rather than through any particular story. Borrowing the notion of transversality from Calvin Schrag, I propose that it is in a transversal arrangement of stories that new meanings emerge. The points at which narratives overlap and intersect are able to both modify the meanings of the intersecting narratives and create new meanings that arise from a combination or even a conflation of stories. I proposed the term ‘transversal narrativity’ to describe this creation of new meanings at the intersection of various narratives.

**Key words:** postfoundational, social constructionism, Narrative, *ubuntu*, xenophobia, violence, foreigners, prejudice, conflict, collaboration, hegemony, antagonism, agonism, transversal narrativity

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTERSECTING STORIES: MY PERSONAL STORY AND THE STORY OF A SOUTH AFRICAN PROBLEM

This research was born out of a desire to contribute in a small, but meaningful way to transformation in South Africa. This is the result of two converging stories: my own personal story, and the story of post-apartheid South Africa and some of the challenges facing it in the area of social cohesion. It is important to acknowledge this at the outset as it locates me as a particular individual, in a particular context. This contextuality is fundamental to both my theology and my research approach and I wish to make this explicit. Self-awareness as an individual in a specific context is the starting point from which this research will proceed. This echoes the words of Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991:16),

We should expect of all practical theologians that they become self-aware, of their prior commitments, on what these commitments are based, and how they affect one's entire approach to practical theology. To make these things explicit for oneself is to become not only self-aware, but also to allow for being self-critical, and to open oneself up to questioning by others.

I will therefore describe my personal story as a South African Christian, born in 1967 and living through apartheid and the struggle against it, and living in post-1994 democratic South Africa. I will also describe some of the current challenges facing South Africa with regard to social cohesion in order to position myself as a researcher and a theologian.

#### 1.1 A hope derailed?

For most of my life I have been interested in the issue of reconciliation, particularly as it applies to the discrimination and pain that have been caused by racism and prejudice in South Africa. This interest has been heightened in recent years. The birth of a democratic South Africa in 1994 created hope for healing and transformation within our society. The leadership of Nelson Mandela was an example and an inspiration that gave impetus towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Desmond Tutu spoke of a "Rainbow Nation", a phrase that encapsulated a vision for the future of South Africa that was full of possibility and hope.

Today it seems that this vision, and the hope that accompanied it, has been significantly eroded. The 2009 SA Reconciliation Barometer Report, published by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation found that confidence in a “happy future for all races” had fallen to 62% in 2009, from its 2005 peak of 86%.

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation's 2013 SA Reconciliation Barometer Report focuses on the relationship between reconciliation, inequality, and exclusion in South Africa. While more than half of the respondents to the survey expressed a desire for a united South Africa and believed it was a possibility, inequality is seen as the biggest source of exclusionary division. Discrimination related to HIV/AIDS and related illnesses is seen as the second largest source of division and exclusion, with political parties being seen as the third largest cause of problematic social relations. While race is only regarded as the fourth largest source of division, the strong correlation between race and social class that exists in South Africa has been noted (Wale 2103).

Other interesting findings of the report that are relevant to this research are that on average, only 20.5% of respondents disagreed with the statement, “Other cultural groups are harmful to mine”, with nearly half of the respondents agreeing with it (Wale 2013:30). Also, the percentage of South Africans who identify with a more inclusive South African identity (as opposed to those based on race, language, culture, ethnicity, religion or neighbourhood) has dropped by half between 2009 and 2013 (Wale 2013:33).

Delegates at a recent Consultation on Social Cohesion and Reconciliation, hosted by the Centre for Contextual Theology at the University of Pretoria, expressed concern at a sense of growing re-segregation in South African society. It seemed as though a window of opportunity had been missed post-1994, and that the divisions in our society were widening - driven by unresolved issues that have remained as a legacy from our colonial and apartheid past.<sup>1</sup>

This gradual slide back into racially based polarisation and hostility has created a profound sense of uneasiness within me. At the same time it has renewed my sense of hope that things could be different, that they can be different, and that the current challenges we face with regard to these issues could spur us on towards creating greater social cohesion.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal notes on facilitated discussions at Consultation on Reconciliation and Social Cohesion at university of Pretoria, 22-23 August 2013

Based on personal observations, it seems that there are strong forces opposing social cohesion: economic inequality, the legacy of the group areas act that still defines the demographics of our cities, fear, suspicion, and prejudice. The possibility of a healed and reconciled nation that was reflected in social discourse in the years that followed the transition to democracy in 1994 seems increasingly remote. Hope for such a nation has been eroded and seems unrealistic and naïve. My motive for doing research was to develop a deeper understanding of the issues that fracture our society – whether these are structural social and economic issues, or issues related to our social identities and how we relate to others who are different from us.

## **1.2 My personal story**

Although I am an English speaking, white South African, I grew up in an unusual family by South African standards. My father, a single child who grew up on a farm, spoke Zulu before he spoke English. His primary childhood friends were the children of farm workers, and this pattern of close friendships across racial lines continued throughout his life. He met my mother through their involvement in the Anglican Church's protest against the apartheid government. Not only did our home experience a flow of guests of every ethnic group and skin colour, it provided a place of refuge for a number of activists from Soweto during the 1976 riots. It was also raided twice during my childhood by the security police. More than the impact of these events, what stood out during my childhood was my parents' passion for a lifestyle that embodied reconciliation across the racial divides that polarised our country.

As a student at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1986 and 1987 I was involved on the periphery of the National Union of South African Students and the United Democratic Front. By the time I was called up for national service, the focus of our defence force had moved from the border between Namibia and Angola to the townships of South Africa. Stories told by friends who were performing their national service in the Defence Force and Police Force created an uncomfortable awareness of what was taking place in the townships. These stories were confirmed by friends of mine who lived in these communities. I refused to participate in the activities of the Defence Force in any way – even as a non-combatant – and applied to be classified as a religious objector.

While performing my alternative service I became involved in the leadership of a small non-denominational congregation in Cape Town. What appealed to me most about this church community was its diversity across categories of race, class, and age. It was during this time that I experienced a strong sense of calling into pastoral ministry, which was confirmed by other leaders in that congregation.

I studied for three years at the Baptist Seminary in Cape Town from 1991 to 1993. This was a crucial time in our country's history, and the ethnically diverse student body created a context in which we could wrestle with the issues of liberation, justice, and reconciliation. However, the privatised theology of much of Evangelicalism seemed inadequate to grapple with these issues.

In 1997, I became a member of the pastoral staff of a congregation in Cape Town that was part of the Association of Vineyard Churches. The focus of my ministry was on mission among young people. In 1998 I started a national youth festival that aimed to bring young people from townships and informal settlements together with young people from the affluent and predominantly white suburbs. It was a residential festival in which thousands of young people spent four days living in tents on campsites, with a deliberate mix of people from different cultures and communities. Sport and music were used as catalysts to bridge divisions. There were over twenty bands performing in different venues, a surf school and skate park, soccer and volleyball tournaments, workshops, and meetings for worship.

Although the festival provided an opportunity for many black children to travel to the sea for the first time in their lives, it also highlighted the racial divisions in South Africa more than it served to bridge them. Not much meaningful inter-racial interaction occurred, apart from what transpired in structured workshops. Where incidents of conflict occurred these tended to be framed along racial lines and perpetuated stereotypes and prejudice.

In 2002 I was appointed as senior pastor of the congregation, and served in this capacity until 2010. A significant focus of my tenure was the task of leading the church on a journey towards becoming a faith community that expressed and embodied the reconciliation and healing we longed to see in South Africa. Part of my leadership task involved guiding the church through a transition towards becoming more reflective of the demographics of the city in which we worshipped. In 2000, within the Association of Vineyard Churches, we had evaluated our progress with regard to meaningful reconciliation. An awareness of how little progress we had made was accompanied by the realisation that for the next ten to twenty

years we needed to commit to an intentional journey towards racial reconciliation and social healing. There was a strong commitment among leaders in the Vineyard movement to this ideal.

Based on what I understand to be a prophetic picture of the church as a vast crowd from every nation, tribe, culture and language in the book of Revelation, chapter 7, I have always believed that an intrinsic feature of the church is that it should be a community where not everyone is black, not everyone is white, not everyone is young, not everyone is old, not everyone is rich, and not everyone is poor. The call for intentional leadership towards being communities that embodied reconciliation on every level resonated with my faith and my personal convictions.

When I first became a staff member at the church there was one black family who were members – out of a membership of around three hundred. The congregation was almost entirely English speaking. When I left that congregation in March 2010, nearly half the church was no longer white, there were seventeen different ethnic groups represented in the membership, and Sunday worship involved the use of a number of languages, including English, Afrikaans, and isiXhosa.

The transition was not without its challenges. A number of white families left the church, some claiming that the church had become noisy, that some of our newer worshipers smelt bad, that children from other cultures disrupted children's church. At a meeting held in November 2008 to address conflict over the direction in which I was leading the congregation, a leader commented that if I had my way we would not be a church where white people felt comfortable. There was also conflict over what was perceived as the disproportionate allocation of church resources to community projects while the congregation met in a school hall and did not own a building. This was exacerbated by the reality that church finances were declining as affluent white members left and the number of members who came from townships and informal settlements grew. Many of these complaints may have arisen from my own shortcomings as a leader, but what they did highlight was the nature of the conflict that arises when a number of different ethnic or cultural groups compete for the same resources or social space. In many ways what I experienced in that congregation was a microcosm of South African society.

As conflict escalated in our church community, and people became increasingly polarised around issues, I started to experience a sense of alienation from ministry. I experienced

pressure from leaders higher up in the Vineyard movement to lead a 'successful' suburban congregation that attracted a crowd of people and generated substantial financial resources, rather than my dream of becoming a more authentic, risky, missional faith community that might have a transformational impact in our post-apartheid context. As I struggled with these pressures, I started to experience a loss of meaning in my work. I became increasingly frustrated with structures that seemed to impede faith and mission rather than serve them. I resented the way money and Sunday attendance had displaced indicators of authentic mission as the dominant metrics for evaluating success in ministry. I resigned as senior pastor at the beginning of 2009, and left the staff of the church in March 2010. I have only attended church services on a couple of occasions since then.

I currently work in the field of leadership development, with a particular focus on the management of change, conflict, and diversity. My work provides an opportunity to observe and interact with conflict and cultural diversity on a daily basis, and the role that leaders play in these contexts. These observations have given rise to questions. My work has also given me experience of participatory learning and problem-solving processes that are powerfully transformative. This has generated curiosity about the research problem in this proposal and a desire to collaborate with other South Africans to understand the social problems that affect us, and to find new pathways towards their resolution.

This curiosity led me to explore further studies. I considered doing a PhD in Organisational Psychology, and also contacted Professor Julian Müller at the University of Pretoria, who had co-supervised my dissertation for my Master's degree in practical theology. His response - that he was currently focusing on issues of cultural diversity, conflict, and social cohesion - was instrumental in my decision to enrol for a PhD in Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria.

### **1.3 Theological positioning**

My theological positioning has been shaped by a spiritual journey that has been influenced by exposure to a wide range of Christian traditions. As a child I attended a wide variety of churches with my parents, from Roman Catholic and Anglican to Pentecostal and Charismatic. My early theological training was in a conservative Evangelical Baptist seminary, and I served as a pastor in a Vineyard church. While I have been shaped by all

of these traditions, my struggles with certain of their features has influenced my current positioning as much, if not more than, the traditions themselves. This has led to my current position as a theologian working outside of formal church structures.

### **1.3.1 Formative influences**

My spiritual journey has been characterised by a number of crises of faith. My involvement in the struggle against apartheid raised questions about prevailing interpretations of the Bible. It seemed astonishingly incongruous that there could be dogmatism about issues like playing sport on Sundays, women wearing trousers, and the use of certain musical instruments in a worship service, while there was silence on issues of social justice. This raised profound questions for me about the nature of Christian faith and praxis, and about its relevance to what seemed to be the most important social issues.

It seemed that, particularly in the arena of faith, it was too easy to 'know' God or formulate biblical knowledge in a manner that was highly subjective and selective. This disturbed me because the prevalence of this in the church suggested that I too was 'knowing' God and reality with the same subjectivity and selectiveness. My conservative evangelical theological training only really reinforced the polarities between correct and incorrect interpretations of the Bible, truth and error – along with a fairly smug assumption that ours was the correct and true interpretation. What was problematic for me was that many of the theological discourses that helped to make sense of South Africa's problems were disregarded by my theological mentors and peers as misguided – and even false or heretical.

Newbigin's (1989) use of Michael Polanyi's epistemology offered possibilities for understanding knowledge differently. Polanyi's theory of Personal Knowledge stressed the role of personal commitments in knowledge. My exposure to liberation and feminist theologies gave me insight into the power dynamics of social and religious discourses. It also marked the beginning of what was to be a growing concern with the way that Enlightenment philosophy seemed to have domesticated and even subverted the Gospel.

My initial theological training was in a Baptist seminary within a conservative evangelical theological tradition. For nearly twenty years I worshipped and served in a church belonging to the Association of Vineyard Churches, a church-planting movement that had its roots in the 'Jesus People' revival in California during the late 1960's and early 1970's,

where hippies and beatniks were coming to faith but finding traditional and mainline churches to be unwelcoming to new converts that did not conform to conservative social norms. Vineyard churches belong to a theological stream that has been called “Empowered Evangelical” by Nathan and Wilson (1995) because of their commitment to conservative evangelical theology and to the experience of the Holy Spirit’s life and power in the church. The history of the Vineyard is recorded by Jackson (1999) in *The Quest for the Radical Middle*.

The Vineyard's theology is based on a framework that comes from an understanding of the Kingdom of God as the dynamic rule of God, which has broken into history in the person of Jesus, that has been developed by Ladd (1952, 1974, 1975) and Bright (1953), and more recently by Wright (1992, 1996) and Dunn (2003). A full explanation of this theological framework of inaugurated eschatology, and its implications for gender roles in the church, is offered in my dissertation for my Master's degree (Eliastam 2010).

Wright (1996:28-29; 83-91) and Dunn (2003:383f) demonstrate that there is a significant consensus among current New Testament scholars that Jesus’ central message was the announcement and inauguration of the Kingdom of God, the kingship and reign of God that has broken into history, particularly in the incarnation and at Pentecost. This has implications for Christian praxis.

Schlabach writes, “Christians live in a meantime between Jesus’ resurrection and a cosmic resurrection – between God having already made the reign of God present in Jesus Christ, and God not yet having brought the fullness of that reign at the culmination of history”. He notes that a full appreciation of the “already” of this eschatological tension leads to a view of the Christian life in which “God’s Spirit is always offering new possibilities, and empowering people of faith to live now according to the future” (Schlabach 2004:367).

Wright (1996:276) suggests that Jesus intended to establish cells of followers who would be distinctive in their communities because they had adopted his praxis. Moltmann (1972:382) is correct in insisting that Christian hope creates ethical imperatives which are then expressed in concrete action. The future, where everything is made right, has broken into the present in Jesus. This determines our identity and our mission in this world. Our mission is to bring the future into the present. The pictures of the reign of God in the Old Testament such as the Exodus and the monarchy under David and Solomon do not permit this future to

be reduced to a private spiritual experience. On the contrary, it touches every area of life on earth.

If the reign of God has broken into history in the person of Jesus, the scope of salvation must extend beyond the personal and individual to the social, the global and even the cosmic. History has a goal, a destination in which sin and evil is defeated and the earth is transformed to reflect God's will. In the face of evil, oppression, and injustice, there is hope. Followers of Christ are called to participate in a mission, where they live in the world, to announce this hope through their words and actions. This theological framework of inaugurated eschatology also forms a lens through which current social contexts are viewed. They are seen in the light of this hope of healing and transformation which is already made possible in Christ, but which looks forward to fulfilment and consummation.

Along with their commitment to this theological framework, Vineyard churches have an approach (Venter 2000) to church life and leadership that is values-based and that is referred to as “building from the bottom up”. This approach is based on the premise that much of what we do in our lives is “caught” rather than “taught”. Leaders, or people with influence, model certain values, priorities and practices, which are then emulated by their followers. My years as a pastor and leader in the Vineyard movement entrenched certain values and priorities, which form the foundation from which Vineyard churches seek to develop. These included:

- a desire for the presence of God as an experienced reality;
- a view of the Bible as the story of God's revelation through God's involvement in history - with an emphasis on the invitation to become part of that story by becoming apprentices of Jesus;
- a strong emphasis on God's grace and mercy;
- a resultant desire to see healing take place on both a personal and social level;
- the primacy of authentic relationships as a basis for community;
- authenticity and ‘being real’ rather than hype of pretence;
- an approach to the Christian life that is holistic, balanced, integrated and inclusive; and
- meaningful restoration and reconciliation between individuals and people groups who are estranged from one another.

These values remain an integral part of my life and spirituality, even though I no longer belong to any formal church. The reasons for this departure from the formal church structures will be explained in the following section.

In May 2008, during my tenure as senior pastor at the Vineyard church in Cape Town, widespread violence against foreign migrants erupted in various cities and towns around South Africa. Many members of our church were directly affected by the violence. The church played a role in relief efforts, alongside other churches in our community. As much as these efforts provided much needed assistance to extremely vulnerable people, I experienced a sense of frustration that churches seemed unable to offer something more than temporary assistance to foreign migrants as a means of addressing the social problems that were reflected in the violence.

### **1.3.2 A Journey away from church structures**

My personal reflections on seventeen years of pastoral ministry, mainly in an affluent, suburban, white community leave me with a sense of profound discontent at the state of the church. Suburban Christianity seems to be driven by rampant consumerism, with congregants constantly on the lookout for new and ‘better’ church offerings, and new religious franchises springing up in every city to cater to these desires. There is certainly a risk of cynicism in my views, but so much of what church life consists of seems to be something of an exercise in missing the point. As a pastor, I could not escape a nagging doubt that if Jesus were to visit our church he would not recognise what we spent most of our time and energy doing as being crucial to his mission. It was not that our activities were wrong or bad, more that the central had become peripheral and the peripheral central. If what one actually values can be seen by what one measures, the dominant metrics of money and attendance at Sunday services suggest that authentic missional community might not be as central a concern as church leaders might like to think it is.

Frost (2006:51) asks, “How did the contemporary church get like this? How did we end up with armies of church leaders who resemble corporate executives and act as if church is a global business? How is it that the subversive, radical nature of the life of Jesus has been so domesticated that we find ourselves in our current position?”.

It is beyond the scope of this research to examine the reasons for what Frost describes. My purpose in referring to these issues is to locate myself in a diverse community of exiles

from the church - people who have left formal church structures because of a sense that these hinder faithful Christian living more than they facilitate it. This has implications for my understanding of practical theology.

My journey of faith has brought me to a place where I have doubts about whether traditional church structures are the most effective way to form faith communities that are transformational and missional. These doubts are supported by studies that demonstrate the extent to which the church is in decline.

Riddell, Kirkpatrick and Pierson (2000:3) argue that the Christian church is dying in the West. His views are supported by research in the United States and the United Kingdom. McLaren (2014) cites research by the Barna Group comparing research in 1996, where 85% of nonreligious Americans viewed Christianity favourably, with research in 2009 where only 16% people with no official religious affiliation had a favourable impression of Christianity.

More recent research by the Barna Group shows that church attendance in the USA has dropped by just under 20% from 2004 to 2014. It also shows that where most people attended church services three or four times a month, they now only attend church once every four to six weeks. More than half of younger Americans say that they have not been to church for over six months. The reasons for this are noteworthy, the report states that:

Millennials who are opting out of church cite three factors with equal weight in their decision: 35% cite the church's irrelevance, hypocrisy, and the moral failures of its leaders as reasons to check out of church altogether. In addition, two out of 10 unchurched Millennials say they feel God is missing in church, and one out of 10 senses that legitimate doubt is prohibited, starting at the front door (Barna 2014).

Barna research revealed that attending church did not make the top ten of a list of things that people thought would help them grow in their faith.

McSwain cites research from the American Religious Affiliation survey that over thirty four million Americans had given up on organised religion, even though for most of these dropouts spirituality remained an integral part of their lives. He writes, "If the current decline in church attendance were the medical case history of a hospital patient, the diagnosis would read: 'Chronically ill; resistant to change; on life support; likely terminal'. The church itself is the one institution most in need of the very thing it proclaims to the world – salvation" (McSwain 2010:56).

Brown (2009) traces the rapid decline of Christianity in Britain, from the 1960's to the present. John Bingham, the Religious Affairs editor for the Telegraph newspaper in the United Kingdom, records the concerns expressed by George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, that Christianity could be extinct in the United Kingdom within a decade. There is a sense of disillusionment - and even boredom - with the church. People, especially younger people, are questioning its relevance (Bingham 2013).

Murray (2004) explores the demise of the church in the United Kingdom and argues that it has reached a point that leads him to conclude that the United Kingdom has moved into post-Christendom. He defines this as, "the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence" (Murray 2004:19).

Osmer and Schweitzer (2000:43) describe how the process of modernisation has displaced the church from its traditional and dominant position, creating a kind of "role uncertainty" as it learns to exist as one system among many. They (2000:xii-xix) list a number of crises that face the church within this context:

1. the inability of the church to incorporate its youth;
2. the increased separation of the church from public education;
3. the growing distance between the family and the church; and
4. the lack of an identity-shaping moral ethos.

These point to a growing crisis of both relevance and credibility within the church. They suggest a disconnect between the message and activities of the church and the shaping of who we understand ourselves to be and how we are to live in family and community. It is therefore not surprising that people are becoming disillusioned with the church and the faith they have received from it, and are deconstructing that received faith in order to find more authentic ways of living in the world.

People who are leaving the church seem to fall into two main streams. In the one stream there are those who have moved away from any form of the Christian faith, and who have embraced alternative faith positions, secularism, or atheism. The other stream consists of people who have left formal church structures in order to find or maintain their Christian faith and live in a way that expresses their faith authentically. Rather than representing a

loss of faith, my journey out of the church has in a very real way been about finding and holding onto faith.

### 1.3.3 My churchless faith

My journey out of and away from traditional, organised church structures, as a means to deepen and live out my Christian faith, is not unique or unusual. In *A Churchless Faith*, Jamieson (2002) documents the departure of people from Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. These are people from the core of active members, not those fringes of churches. Many of them were leaders or pastors or missionaries. On average, they had been involved in churches for sixteen years. Jamieson suggests that there are different kinds of leavers; he speaks of “displaced followers”, “reflective exiles”, “transitional explorers” and “integrated wayfinders” but admits that reality is more complex than his four categories suggest.

*Displaced Followers* left because they were hurt or angry with the church, but they retained the faith content and the spirituality of the churches they had left. They have a received faith that is dependent on an external authority beyond themselves.

*Reflective Exiles* leave through a process that can take up to 18 months. Their departure is the result of ongoing questioning of the foundations of their faith and a sense of disconnect between their received faith and most of their lives. Their separation from church is part of a process of deconstructing their faith which is destabilising for them, and which results in a hesitant, tentative ownership of their faith.

*Transitional Explorers* have moved from deconstructing their faith into an emerging sense of ownership of their faith, which integrates elements of their old faith with new beliefs. This group was characterised by degrees of agnosticism, with some members transitioning to alternative faith positions.

*Integrated Wayfinders* were those who had reached a point in their reconstruction of their faith where they had developed an integrated faith in terms of its content, and also integrated that faith into their lives. While there is ongoing evaluation and appropriate questioning, the structure of the faith is there and the person appropriates it as their own.

What is significant about Jamieson’s research is that it described people who were not

leaving churches because they had lost their faith, but who were leaving churches in order to live out their faith more authentically.

Jamieson's attempt to align his four categories with Fowler's (1995) model of faith development results in categories that may not be as distinct as he suggests. There is something of each of Jamieson's categories in me. There is undoubtedly hurt and anger that is the result of the last few years before I left paid ministry in the church. There is a sense of disconnect between the faith I received and the life I live, which leads me to deconstruct that faith and interrogate its propositions and its usefulness. I also seem to live in a continual process of letting go of parts of my faith and holding onto parts of it, integrating new beliefs with old ones. This has led to a place where, among all the not knowing or seemingly unknowable, there is a core of faith that is real and powerful in my life and that serves to give my life both direction and meaning as I wrestle with its implications.

### **1.3.4 Doing theology as an exile**

Brueggemann (1997) argues that the Old Testament exile of the Jewish people in Babylon is a suitable metaphor for the experience of dislocation, vulnerability, and uncertainty that many Christians currently experience. Following the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C.E. the Jews were taken to Babylon, where they had to adapt to life in a new world. They were allowed to observe their customs and religious practices, but they could not return home.

Brueggemann sees the church as struggling with loss and humiliation in the same way as the Jewish exiles did. The ground has moved under the church and it finds itself in a place of loss and even fear. In suggesting this Brueggemann is not referring to institutional health as much as the experienced anxiety of "deported" people. Exile is social, moral, and cultural rather than geographical. He writes, "the exiles experienced a loss of the structured, reliable world which gave them meaning and coherence, and they found themselves in a context where their most treasured and trusted symbols of faith were mocked, trivialized, or dismissed" (1997:2). His concern is pastoral rather than institutional, and he argues that both preaching and ministry need to interface with this situation of exile.

Brueggemann suggests a duality in the sense that it is both Christian exile in a secular culture and cultural exile that is the result of the loss of traditional hegemony. He points out

that the duality of the exile is the result of the close but no longer sustainable alliance between establishment culture and establishment Christianity.

To borrow Brueggemann's analogy, I am doing practical theology in a context of exile, as a member of a faith tradition that has lost its privileged place in society and also as an exile from the formal structures of that faith tradition. Brueggemann (1997:4-11) proposes six interfaces between the circumstance of exile and scriptural resources:

*i. Exiles must grieve their loss and express their resentful sadness about what was and now is not and never will be again.* This involves honesty about the disappearance of the days when our churches and denominations were forces to be reckoned with. We need to become communities of honest sadness and name the losses in order to counter a culture of denial. Brueggemann suggests the book of Lamentations as a scriptural resource for this.

*ii. The experience of exile is like that of an orphaned child who is abandoned and vulnerable.* Terms like "forgotten" and "forsaken" in Lamentations 5:20 suggest that this is the case. Brueggemann (1997:5) writes, "There is no sure home, no old family place, no recognisable family food". He proposes genealogies such as those in Matthew 1:1-17 and Hebrews 11 as resources that connect us with those who have risked and hoped before us.

*iii. The power of despair, which is the most obvious reality and the greatest threat to exiles.* All that we have worked for is lost, with no prospect of recovering it, and we find ourselves powerless in our new situation. This brings the dual dangers of doubting God's care and doubting God's ability to act. For Brueggemann (1997:7), the scriptural resource against this kind of despair is found in Isaiah 40-55, which "explodes" the faith of Israel by expanding the scope of God's saving activity from the arena of their national concerns to the whole of reality. He writes, "Israel is urged to 'think big' and to 'sing big' about the forces of life at work on its behalf".

*iv. Exile is an experience of profaned absence.* It is an experience of the absence of God, not only in a personal sense but also in the institutional sense that "the glory has departed". Things that were once sacred are no longer sacred, and treasured symbols are no longer respected. Brueggemann writes (1997:7-8), "With the absence of God, larger 'meanings' become impossible. And because God is absent we become increasingly selfish and

brutalizing, because without God ‘everything is possible’”. He suggests that the Priestly texts of the Pentateuch are a rich resource as a pastoral response to this crisis of absence.

*v. Exile is an experience of moral incongruity.* If the exile was collective judgement for Israel's violation of the Torah, there is a sense of blame that comes from this. However, there is also the sense that there is something more than what we did wrong that has caused this disruption and destabilisation. This raises the problem of theodicy. For Brueggemann (1997:10), the book of Job is a resource for this interface because it wrestles directly with the simplistic claims of retribution theology. He writes, “In the poem of Job, the questions of failure, fault, blame, and guilt simply evaporate. We are invited to a larger vista of mystery that contains wild and threatening dimensions of faith”.

*vi. The danger of exile is a self-preoccupation that robs one of the ability to rethink, reimagine, and redescribe larger reality.* The Joseph, Esther and Daniel narratives are proposed as a resource for this. These are characters who remember who they are and the God whom they serve. They are examples of a kind of shrewd negotiation between faith and the realities of culture that serve as models for “living freely, dangerously, and tenaciously in a world where faith does not have its own way” (Brueggemann 1997:10).

While Brueggemann relates these interfaces specifically to preaching, I find that they are rich in their ability to describe the spiritual landscape of the context in which I am doing practical theology. I experience a profound sense of loss over what was but what is no more. I feel uprooted and spiritually homeless. I struggle with doubts about God's care and God's power to act in the South African context. My spirituality seems to have echoes of God's presence rather than the glory of God's manifest presence. I am tempted to blame myself, both for where I am and for where the church is (as a leader in the church I have surely been complicit in its shortcomings). Yet, there are clearly larger forces at work, trends within the church and the world that are far bigger than me and my shortcomings.

For Brueggemann, the danger is that the church nostalgically looks back to what was but will never be again, and tries to protect its shrinking territory. This prevents it from courageously re-thinking, reimagining and re-describing a larger reality. He argues (1997:14) that preaching and ministry has to stress the theme of homecoming, but that this isn't a return to what was and is now irreversibly gone. The home is the Kingdom of God, a sphere in which God performs acts of transformation that the world sees as impossible. He

writes, “the Kingdom is a time and place and context in which God’s ‘impossibilities’ for life, joy, and wholeness are all made possible and available”.

As a practical theologian ‘in exile’ I live in this tension between ‘what is’ and ‘what God promises’. With the exiles I grieve over what has been lost and wasted. With Joseph, Esther and Daniel I negotiate what it means to be a person of faith in a world that seems hostile to that faith. With Job I wrestle with questions about guilt, and blame, and the way life in the world questions the power and goodness of God. With Isaiah, I dream of the day when God will act decisively to renew and restore.

Frost (2006:81) borrows Brueggemann's exile metaphor, and lists a number of promises that describe spirituality for this period of exile:

- We will be authentic;
- We will serve a cause greater than ourselves;
- We will create missional community;
- We will be generous and practice hospitality; and
- We will work righteously as God's apprentices.

These promises form a foundation for spirituality in a post-Christian empire, but Frost goes on to describe an obligation to engage that empire with what he calls “the practice of a dangerous critique” and calls for exiles to “censure the empire for its complicity in injustice, oppression, and environmental destruction” (2006:203). My theological reflections in general and this research in particular, are tied to both the spirituality and the obligation to critique that Frost describes.

I have no formal church membership or affiliation and I regard myself as a practical theologian who is doing theology in a post-church context. For me, there is no sacred or secular; there is simply life. There is no split between clergy and laity, or between ministry and the rest of life. There is no ‘us’ and ‘them’ of belonging or not belonging, there are simply people. I encounter these people in the plush offices of large corporations and on the dusty streets of rural villages; I encounter them in comfortable suburban homes and in the squalor of urban informal settlements. This is where ministry takes place; this is where I do theology. I live, work and do theology separated by choice from official Christian structures. This is simultaneously liberating and frustrating. It is liberating because I am free to question, to challenge, to imagine, to dream and to act. It is frustrating because, while

the scope of my dreams and imagination may be vast, the scope of my actions is limited by the extent of my personal resources.

Nevertheless, I continue to imagine what the implications of the Kingdom of God are for South Africa and the world; I continue to dream of the possibilities that are awakened by my faith. I do so, knowing that even though I can only do theology and act in a small, local context, I am not alone. There are other exiles, both within and outside official church structures that are also imagining and dreaming and acting.

### **1.3.5 Practical theology outside the church**

My positioning in practical theology reflects paradigm shifts that have taken place within the discipline over the past half century, but moves beyond these, locating me in post-church discourses that explore authentic, faithful living as Christ-followers outside of traditional church structures.

The development of a disjunction between theology and church practice on the one hand and life on the other, that has prompted many people to move away from formal church structures, finds its origins in an historical process by which theology moved from being practical and focused on the life of faith in the world, to being a theoretical discipline aimed at assimilating and ordering a body of knowledge that could be construed as 'true'. Maddox (1990) traces the historical process through which all theology moved from being generally regarded as practical in nature, to becoming a discipline that was split into a dominant theoretical focus on theology as science and a subordinate practical/spirituality component.

Maddox argues that within early Christianity theology could be thought of as an implicit worldview that shaped the character and actions of Christians. There was a focus on application to the life of faith that is captured in Augustine's conviction that anything that did not contribute to the birth, nourishment, defence, and strengthening of faith was "empty vanity and mischievous curiosity" (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book 14, chapter 1).

During the medieval period, theological reflection shifted from this more pastoral context and concern as it became located in emerging universities, which were usually connected to a monastery or a cathedral. This change in context led to the adoption of an Aristotelian model of theology as science where knowledge was assimilated for its own sake. Through the influence of Aquinas, theology became primarily a speculative science within universities; practical theology was developed in monasteries and tended to develop a

spirituality that was appropriate for monastic life. The application of theology to life became increasingly problematic. Maddox argues that practical theology was marginalised and became a separate discipline focused on Christian spirituality, which was relevant for monastic life but had little correlation with Christian living in the world.

The Enlightenment, and Kant in particular, changed the way theology was understood even further. Doctrinal reflection was further split from the practicalities of the Christian life. Maddox notes that after Schleiermacher, the scope of practical theology was narrowed to ecclesial practice and then even further to the practice of the clergy. He writes (1990:659), “Practical theology became pastoral theology, a discipline aimed at helping ministers to handle the technical aspects of their profession. As such it was now only indirectly related to guiding the formation and decision making of Christians in the world”.

Immink (2005:5) cites the words of Theodor Liebner, spoken in the 19th century, which captures this focus, “The content, the object of practical theology is what the church itself does to itself”. Graham (1996) argues that following the emergence of pastoral or practical theology in the modern era, in the mid eighteenth century, it has been concerned with practical aspects of Christianity. These include worship, preaching, rituals, social action, personal care, community building, and Christian education. Typically, these have been regarded as the concerns of ordained clergy. The dominance of ecclesial or clerical approaches to practical theology was driven by a professionalisation of ministry, which these approaches then served and perpetuated.

The split in theology described by Maddox may explain the current lack of relevance to life that people attribute to the church, and why people are leaving the church to seek alternative forms of spirituality that they deem to be more authentic and meaningful. When theological abstractions are made deductively from Scripture and then imposed onto contexts the danger is that such theology may only succeed in answering the questions that no one is asking in those contexts.

Practical theologians have responded to this challenge. Browning (1983:10-17) discusses a number of paradigm shifts that have occurred within practical theology. These include:

- A move away from the clerical paradigm with its focus on the internal life of the church towards focus on the church's life in the world.

- A prioritisation of practice over theory, through praxis that reflects critically on theory.
- A move away from practical theology as saying to practical theology as doing. This doing involves action aimed at liberation and transformation.
- A move towards critical dialogue between practical theology and other religions and forms of knowledge. The social sciences are seen as a valuable interdisciplinary partner in this dialogue.
- A recognition of the important role that theological ethics and moral philosophy play in shaping the process of social and individual transformation.

These trends are reflected in my approach to practical theology, particularly the focus on the life of followers of Jesus in the world.

Liberation theology has also played a significant role in reshaping the agenda and method of practical theology. Rebecca Chopp (1986:140) describes the perspective of liberation theology, “theology is known as a practical activity, characterised by its concreteness in dealing with particular events, stories, and witnesses rather than limiting its role to the analysis of general concepts of existence and tradition”. Liberation theology is a “critical reflection on praxis”, in the light of the Word (Gutierrez 1973:38), and this reflection takes place within and upon the concrete historical context in which the theologian is located. This research will follow the same approach by starting with a particular context, and then engaging in critical reflection on that context in dialogue with other disciplines and in the light of the biblical narrative.

An important facet of liberation theology is the way it recognises that theology exists in the public and political spheres. Segundo (1976:74) insisted that all theology is political, even in the absence of explicitly political language or ideas. This research will intentionally engage in theological reflection in a public, political space rather than within formal ecclesial structures.

There have also been calls to involve all people in theological reflection (Amirtham & Pobebe 1986; Casalis 1986), arguing that non-professionals should play a constructive role in theological reflection, not simply be an audience that receives its conclusions. I would argue that this broadening of the scope of theological reflection needs to be extended beyond formal faith communities to include people who live within other spheres of influence and activity, and who are interested in reflecting on the implications this has for

the way we live. This research involves a group of participants from the research context in reflection with and alongside me.

This research has a pastoral focus in the broader sense contemplated by Gerkin (1986), Capps (1984) and Fowler (1987). This approach regards the pastoral care provider as a representative of the Christian community in a fragmented and pluralistic society (Furness 1994). The biblical narrative offers alternative possibilities for the construction of meaning (Gerkin 1991). Gerkin (1986, 1991) proposes a metaphorical, Narrative practical theology and understands pastoral work as a dialogue between a particular human situation and the Christian story (1991:16).

Gerkin (1986:5) notes that we use language to make sense of what we experience. Ganzevoort (1993:277) writes that, "A story is not just a way of conveying information, it is a way of interpreting facts". He proposes a hermeneutical Narrative approach to explore personal narratives and notes that once a story is shared, it changes and becomes a text that can be reinterpreted. While this research will not follow a hermeneutical approach, the possibility it offers for stories to be told and new meanings to be constructed, as people's stories intersect with God's story, brings a pastoral focus to the research.

The approach to practical theology in this research regards it as the pastoral function in the world of followers of Christ. This involves both transformative action and discursive practices that are aimed at persuading people that the life and message of Jesus Christ are the lens through which we can make sense of our lives on earth and live the best possible lives.

Savage and Presnell (2008:52) describe pastoral theology as a critical conversation that takes place at the meeting point of the multiple narratives that surround a particular contemporary situation. This description is important because it brings together context, pastoral concern, and a Narrative approach that is relational in nature.

Woodward and Pattison (2000:13-15) describe some characteristics of practical theology that are reflected in my approach to research:

- Practical theology is a transformational activity, transforming both the community and the concepts that are used to understand the community.
- Practical theology is contextual. It describes a specific context and avoids generalisation.

- Practical theology is experiential.
- Practical theology is interdisciplinary.

### 1.3.6 A liminal position in practical theology

Roxburgh (2005) points out the radical and discontinuous nature of the changes that have taken place in Western society over the past fifty years, and traces the impact that these have had on the church. Roxburgh borrows the concept of *liminality* from anthropology to describe the consequences of these shifts.

Liminality was first described by van Gennep (1960), and developed by Turner (1967; 1969). Turner (1969:94) observed three phases in transition experiences:

- separation – losing an old world;
- margin (liminality) – entering an unknown world; and
- re-aggregation – re-emerging into a new world.

For Turner (1967:94), the liminal functions as the period of transition from “one type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised” to another. There is an instability associated with liminality because it is a stage of transition or a process of becoming. Turner (1969:95) describes liminal positions as “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony”. He refers to this space as ‘the realm of pure possibility’.

The term liminality is often used fairly loosely in discourse. Roxburgh (2005) defines it as the condition of being on the threshold or at the beginning of a process. Liminality can also be used to describe the space between historical periods, or cultural communities, in which political or cultural change takes place (Thomassen 2009). In such periods social hierarchies and traditions may be disrupted. Discontinuity and uncertainty create a space of indeterminacy, openness and flexibility in which new traditions and institutions may arise (Horvath, Thomassen & Wydra 2009).

My sense is that I am doing theology within a context that is transitional, where things are in a state of flux. This idea of flux and transition could be applied to my personal journey, to the position of the church and Christianity relative to shifts in Western culture, and to the position of South Africa as it emerges from the legacy of colonialism and apartheid.

## 1.4 Research problem

Post-apartheid South Africa is characterised by social and economic divisions, which give rise to conflict. A history of colonial oppression, followed by the racial segregation of apartheid, has created a context where the lines in many of these conflicts tend to be drawn along racial or ethnic lines. It seems almost impossible not to do this because of the way wealth and access to resources is still very visibly distributed along racial lines.

My experiences in the church made me curious about the way conflict between groups seemed to skew one group's perceptions of the other group. In 2008 it would have been difficult to find a member of our congregation that would admit they were prejudiced. Yet, when there was some perception that they were being threatened or inconvenienced by people who were racially or culturally different, prejudice became evident. What caused this shift where latent or dormant attitudes were triggered to the extent that they could be expressed by people who would at the same time admit that their prejudice was both wrong and destructive?

Initially I planned to interview people in various contexts of cross-cultural conflict, including:

- conflict between black congregants and white congregants in a local church;
- conflict between black and white people who have either been advantaged or disadvantaged by the legacy of apartheid, and by corrective measures such as affirmative action and Employment Equity policies; and
- conflict between local South Africans and migrants from other parts of Africa.

As I began my research, it became apparent to me that doing research in multiple contexts could be problematic. It would create a risk of making generalisations from one context to another, or conflating the meanings given by participants in different contexts. Also, the issues underlying the different conflicts, while superficially similar, were actually substantially different. For this reason, I decided to focus on one of the conflicts, the one between South Africans and foreign migrants that erupted into widespread violence in May 2008 and that has simmered in communities around South Africa since then.

In the period between 11 and 26 May, 62 foreign nationals were killed, around 700 injured, and an estimated 35 000 foreigners were driven from their homes. In *The Perfect Storm: The Realities of Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa* (Crush (ed) 2008), the Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP) refers to their 2006 xenophobia survey

and argues that South Africans show levels of hostility and intolerance to foreigners that are virtually unparalleled elsewhere in the world. The authors of the study also contend that, “Further xenophobic violence, even a repetition of May 2008, is almost inevitable without the implementation of short and longer-term measures” (Crush (ed) 2008:8). Crush’s words have been proven to be accurate, with violence against foreign migrants from other African countries occurring sporadically since 2008, and occasionally escalating to levels where it threatens to approach the scale of the 2008 violence, such as the violence against foreigners that occurred in Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal in January and April of 2015 respectively.

It seemed important to understand more about this phenomenon and find ways to help those affected by it – both the victims and the perpetrators. The violence and the language that accompanied it had a frightening similarity to violence in other countries that had escalated into genocide. Stanton (2004), in his exploration of whether the Rwandan genocide could have been prevented, identified eight stages of social change that can serve as markers and warnings. First there is *classification* (“us versus them”), and then there is *symbolisation*, where groups are given names or symbols of their status as second-class citizens. *Dehumanisation* follows, in which groups are given the names of bad things such as cancer or cockroaches. Then there is *organisation*, where hate groups organise and arm themselves, and then *polarisation*, in which moderates are targeted, marginalised, and even assassinated. After *preparation* and training, the *extermination* of the “less human” enemies takes place, followed by *denial*. There is certainly evidence of Stanton’s first three stages in South Africa, and the violence against foreigners in South Africa exhibits tendencies towards the more extreme stages of social change described by Stanton.

Donahue (2012:14) suggests that the early stages are important because they offer potential for understanding the language that is being used and crafting interventions to turn the language in a more helpful direction.

Following Donahue, I wanted to explore the language around this phenomenon. What stories are people telling about foreigners? What words are used, and what do these words mean to them? How does this language construct their sense of identity in relation to others? What options for action emerge from this? And, what are the possibilities for intervention at the level of language and story?

I was curious about the discourses that shape the way that community members view foreigners, and how these discourses function as interpretive repertoires or resources for communication. Of the various discourses that exist, I was particularly curious about the role that *ubuntu*, a traditional African social value, was playing in shaping meaning and social relationships within this context. *Ubuntu* was frequently mentioned in public discourse as a solution to the violence, along with the argument that the violence indicated a lack of *ubuntu*.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu (1999:34-35) explains that the meaning of *ubuntu* is that, “a person is a person through other people’. It is not ‘I think therefore I am’. It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong’. I participate, I share”. The concept highlights the interconnectedness of human society, with the implication that people should treat others as part of the extended human family (Gish 2004:122).

While *ubuntu* is a social value that is fundamental to indigenous South African cultures, it raises questions and highlights contradictions. If *ubuntu* is powerful and pervasive as a social value, how could foreign migrants be treated the way they have been? Has *ubuntu* lost its ability to shape social interactions in South Africa? Is it still useful as a value that supports nation building and social cohesion?

## 1.5 Research questions

A wide range of explanations for xenophobic violence in South Africa have been put forward. These could be broadly categorised as explanations that focus on economic and social conditions, explanations that focus on the political, and explanations that explore South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past to explain the xenophobic violence.

Tilly (2003:20) observes that, “analysts often propose large-scale causes (poverty, widespread frustration, extremism, resource competition and so on) as necessary or sufficient conditions for whole episodes of collective violence”. Studies that explore xenophobic attitudes and violence on the ground and attempt to explain it from the bottom up are more rare, although Cooper (2009), Von Holdt et al (2011), Nieftagodien (2012), Monson (2012; 2015), and Kerr and Durrheim (2013) make valuable contributions in understanding the issue from this perspective. However, like much of the research, they

tend to focus on offering explanations for the eruption of overt violence against foreigners and identifying specific triggers for this violence.

This research makes a contribution to the study of violence against foreigners in local contexts. Its uniqueness is in its attempt to understand the social construction of meaning that shapes the attitudes in the local context. Its scope is not limited to actual incidents of violence against foreigners, but rather with a social creation of meaning that results in a form of discursive violence, which may precipitate other types of violence against foreigners.

### **1.5.1 Primary research question**

How is meaning with regard to foreigners that leads to violence against them in South Africa being narratively constructed?

### **1.5.2 Secondary research questions**

- What are some of the stories being told about foreign migrants in this community?
- How do people in this community understand and explain their attitudes and actions towards foreigners?
- How do these attitudes and actions towards foreigners cohere with *ubuntu*?
- What are the needs and interests of people in these communities, and how does the presence of foreigners impact these?
- How are these meanings being constructed narratively?
- What role does faith play in the construction of these meanings?
- How do these narratives about foreigners prompt violence against foreigners?
- What are the pastoral and leadership challenges in dealing with the stories that are used to justify violence against foreigners?

## **1.6 Research aim and specific objectives**

### **1.6.1 General aim**

This research explores the violence against foreigners in South Africa as a product of discourse. This research rejects a reified, essentialised notion of xenophobia, as an

explanation for the violence and seeks to understand it by exploring the social construction of meaning that results in violence against foreigners.

### **1.6.2 Specific objectives**

The objectives of this research were:

- To do participatory, Narrative research with South African citizens in the Nxuba Municipal District and East London in the Eastern Cape;
- To describe social discourse in relation to foreign migrants in these communities;
- To investigate the Discourses that function as resources for the creation of meaning in relation to foreigners;
- To understand the construction of difference and prejudice in these communities, as products of the social construction of identity;
- To understand the needs and interests of people in these communities, and how the presence of foreigners affects these;
- To engage in an interdisciplinary conversation in order to develop a thicker description of the violence against foreigners in South Africa; and
- To explore possibilities for facilitating the construction of alternative meanings in relation to foreign migrants.

## **1.7 Epistemology: Postfoundationalism and Social Constructionism**

My positioning as a practical theologian in the liminal context described earlier in this chapter has implications for my epistemology. Optimal understanding would be facilitated by a critical interdisciplinary dialogue in which multiple perspectives are allowed to emerge. An epistemology that makes interdisciplinary dialogue possible is also essential because of the interdisciplinary nature of my work. This section will provide an introduction to my postfoundational epistemology. It will be described in detail in chapter 2, along with a more detailed description of the research approach that is taken in this study, and the reasons for taking this particular approach.

### **1.7.1 Postfoundationalism**

My personal faith story and my positioning in practical theology lead me to follow Van

Huyssteen's (1997, 1999) postfoundational approach to epistemology. My theological training has largely been in what would be called a foundationalist approach, but over the past ten years I have found this to be increasingly unhelpful. It seems unable to deal with the tensions and paradoxes in faith and life that are evident to me.

In the Enlightenment paradigm of knowledge, the autonomous, enlightened thinking subject (committed to the Descartes' principle of methodological doubt) approaches the passive object of study to interrogate it. Knowledge of the object is obtained through sense perceptions, which are regarded as a reliable source of knowledge. As a result, the thinking subject has an idea of the object in mind, which is articulated in a word, or name given to the idea, which is identical to the object of study.

The term *modernism* is used to describe the fairly broad cultural movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that was based on Enlightenment philosophy. A central feature of modernism was the dominance of scientific positivism, in which knowledge is grounded in empirical facts that are uninterpreted, unquestionable and that have a fixed meaning. Modernism portrayed a profound confidence in human reason. Van Huyssteen (1997:23) writes, "The subject-centred epistemological paradigm of modernity thus marked the modern age as not only an age of representational knowledge, but also as an age of individualism, rationalization, technical control and secularization".

Foundationalism is a feature of the epistemology of modernism (Van Huyssteen's 1999:62). Certainty about certain first principles creates a foundation upon which further knowledge can be built, and through a process of deduction and induction concepts and language about reality are developed that mirror reality itself. This gave rise to the grand metanarratives of modernity that claim to provide knowledge of reality that is certain, free of culture and tradition, and universal.

Postmodernism has demolished the understandings of knowledge that developed out of the Enlightenment. Postmodernism can be viewed in one of three ways, as a social phenomenon (an era), as a critique or strategy (usually deconstruction), or as a hermeneutic and epistemology. What follows will be restricted to postmodernism as a shift in epistemology.

In the same way that modernism was expressed in foundationalist ideas of rationality, so postmodernism is expressed in non-foundationalist conceptions of rationality. Human

knowledge is pictured as an evolving social phenomenon within a web of beliefs. In this web all data are theory laden, scientific theories are not determined by facts, and science is a truly cultural and social phenomenon (Van Huyssteen 1997:267). There are no 'objective' facts. All 'facts' are interpreted reality. They emerge from a given society, or interest group, or bias. Derrida takes the process to its logical conclusion. Knowledge has become the politics of interpretation. All facts are politically determined. They require deconstruction through interrogating the power play and motives of the author.

Both foundationalism and non-foundationalism create problems for research. Foundationalism fails to recognise the subjective and contextual aspects of knowledge. The absolute relativism of non-foundationalism limits the scope of knowledge and research to the local and subjective to such an extent that they become virtually irrelevant.

A postfoundational approach offers the possibility of avoiding the naïve realism of foundationalist approaches, without surrendering to the absolute relativity of non-foundationalist approaches. In Van Huyssteen's (2006:22) words postfoundationalism seeks a balance between, "the way our beliefs are anchored in interpreted experience, and the broader networks of beliefs in which our rationally compelling experiences are already embedded".

Van Huyssteen's postfoundational approach also offers significant possibilities for interdisciplinary research. He (1999:117) argues that the post-Kuhn era has established that there can be no sharp line of demarcation between scientific rationality and other forms of rationality. Rather, all forms of human rationality are the same. There is now a blurred distinction between the natural and the human sciences, "since the same kind of interpretive procedures is at work in all our varied, and often widely divergent, reasoning strategies" (Van Huyssteen 1999:44-45).

Interdisciplinary dialogue is demanded by my positioning in practical theology, and by the context in which I work and minister. A postfoundational epistemology makes such a dialogue possible.

The concept of transversal rationality proposed by Schrag (1992) and Van Huyssteen (2006) will form the basis for interdisciplinary dialogue in this research. Van Huyssteen (2007:19) explains, "in the multidisciplinary use of the concept of transversality there emerge distinct characteristics or features: the dynamics of consciousness, the

interweaving of many voices, the interplay of social practices are all expressed in a metaphor that points to a sense of transition, lying across, extending over, intersecting, meeting and conveying without becoming identical”. This research will explore the spaces where different disciplines converge and where productive interdisciplinary dialogue can occur.

### **1.7.2 Social Constructionism**

This research will approach the phenomenon of prejudice from a social constructionist perspective. According to social constructionism all our ways of understanding and knowing are negotiated and constructed in social interaction between people (Gergen 1985:267).

Social constructionism (Berger & Luckman 1966; Burr 2003; Crotty 1998; Gergen 2001; Hacking 1999; Harré 1986; Potter 1996) offers an explanation for the processes by which people describe, explain and give an account for the world in which they live. The term describes a group of approaches to knowledge that view our ways of understanding reality as negotiated and constructed in social interactions between people (Burr 1995:4; Gergen 1985:267). Through this socially constructed knowledge people come to understand the world around them and define ‘reality’. This means that people construct their social and cultural worlds while these worlds simultaneously construct them.

We make sense of our lives and our world through the social context in which we exist. Geertz’s (1973:5) comments capture the essence of the social construction of knowledge, saying, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun”. He adds, “the imposition of meaning on life is the major end and primary condition of human existence” (1973:434).

Crotty (2003:43-44) notes that the constructionist approach does not see people as creating reality in the manner suggested by the complete subjectivity of non-foundationalism. Rather, we construct meaning as we interact with the world and objects in the world. This allows constructionism to hold objectivity and subjectivity together.

Müller (2009:205) notes that the idea of socially constructed meaning is part of the postfoundationalist approach. Van Huyssteen (2006:24) expresses the same idea, “Because of our irrevocable contextuality and the embeddedness of all belief and action in

networks of cultural traditions, beliefs, meaning and action arise out of our embedded life worlds”.

The methodological implications of the paradigm are that my research starts in a specific context, and explores the construction of meaning in that context. It also recognises my own situatedness and involvement in the research. The implications are developed further in my research approach, which is described next.

## **1.8 Research approach**

As with my epistemology, I will offer a brief introduction to my research approach in this chapter. In chapter 2 I will provide a more detailed explanation. I will also explain my choice of this particular approach for my research.

### **1.8.1 A qualitative study**

Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) write that qualitative research is, “multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”.

A qualitative study was chosen for its congruency with a postfoundationalist epistemology. It is an interpretive approach that seeks to understand, “how people understand their worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives” (Rubin & Rubin 1995:35). This study will explore the social discourses concerning foreigners within the research context, and the way people position themselves relative to those discourses.

Denzin & Lincoln (1994:4) liken the qualitative researcher to a quilt maker, or a filmmaker creating a montage. Interviews with individuals and participatory action research with groups of people will seek to uncover data on the social construction of prejudice. Participants in the research will be encouraged to elaborate on their answers, to tell stories of relevant incidents, and reflect on their thinking, in order to produce what Geertz (1973) has called a thick description. Geertz (1973:9) explains that, “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they are up to”. While the term is defined in different ways, Denzin (1989:33) defines a thick description in this way,

(1) It gives the context of an act; (2) it states the intentions and meanings that organize the action; (3) it traces the evolution and development of the act; (4) it presents the action as a text that can then be interpreted. A thin description simply reports facts, independent of intentions or the circumstances that surround an action.

He further explains that it discovers and extracts the meanings, actions and feelings of the people or phenomena we are observing.

Interviews attempted to go deeper than surface explanations, and following Rubin and Rubin (1995:8), explored the vocabulary, metaphors and assumptions that lie in the answers that are given in order to understand the way people interpret their worlds. I attempted to listen to the stories of participants in order to understand the way that conflict has changed or distorted their perceptions of the other party or group in the conflict.

### **1.8.2 A Narrative inquiry**

Within the broader framework of qualitative research, this research utilised a specific Narrative approach. Müller (2009:204) points out that a postfoundationalist approach forces us to listen to the stories of people in a particular context. He cites Van Huyssteen (2006:10), "...embodied persons, and not abstract beliefs, should be seen as the locus of rationality. We, as rational agents, are thus always socially and contextually embedded".

Elliot (2005:3) suggests that Hinchman and Hinchman (1997:xvi) provide a useful description of Narrative:

Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it.

Anderson and Foley (2002:4) provide further insight into the role of Narrative in human experience, "Human experience is structured in time and narrative. We comprehend our lives not as disconnected actions or isolated events but in terms of a narrative".

A Narrative approach means taking what Anderson and Goolishian (1992:27) call a "not knowing" approach in the conversation, recognising that I am an outsider and that the other person is the expert on their own story. Morgan (2000:2) writes that a Narrative approach requires the researcher to be respectful, non-judgemental, and only ask questions out of real curiosity.

Elliot (2005:140) notes that narrative is not merely descriptive, it is constitutive of the self and it offers the potential for research to be a significant transformational experience. A Narrative approach therefore offers significant possibilities for the reconstruction of negative perceptions and attitudes of prejudice. Mishler (1986:119) writes that, “through their narratives people may be moved beyond the text to the possibilities of action”.

In order to avoid the danger that Müller (2009:224) identifies, of the researcher’s rationality becoming a kind of “God’s eye view” of the people who are interviewed, the reflections of research participants have been elicited and included in the research so that their own rationality is reflected. I will refer to the research participants as “co-researchers”, because this research reflects a production of knowledge to which they contributed.

The reflections of co-researchers have been invited on:

- my recording of their stories about the presence of foreigners in their communities;
- the various stories about foreigners that emerged from the interviews;
- the insights generated by the literature study and the interdisciplinary dialogue; and,
- their experience of being part of the research process.

### **1.8.3 An interdisciplinary study**

Following the Narrative interview process for gathering empirical data, a literature study was conducted. This literature study took the form of an interdisciplinary dialogue using the framework of transversal rationality described by Schrag (1992) and Van Huyssteen (2006) and engaged with insights from Social Psychology, Organisational Psychology, and Political Science.

## **1.9 Research process**

### **1.9.1 Finding participants**

During late 2012 and 2013 I worked in partnership with a Non-profit Organisation in the Eastern Cape and local government to provide training and capacity building workshops as part of the Community Works Programme. This work took me into cities, towns and villages

across the Eastern Cape. More than that, the workshops created a conversational space where both the challenges and aspirations of members of these communities could be discussed. During workshops in East London and in the Nxuba Municipality in the Eastern Cape, the subject of foreigners and their impact on local communities came up. While this was peripheral to the workshop itself, I asked workshop participants if they would like to explore the issue with me. A number of people expressed interest and I met with them and explained my proposed research. These meetings gave rise to two groups of co-researchers, one group in a rural context and the other in an urban context.

My choice of participants was influenced by my experience that violence against foreign migrants was a risky subject, and when I spoke to complete strangers about it they seemed reluctant to offer more than basic condemnations of the violence. The workshop participants had experienced me as someone who respected their voices and their stories, and I had built rapport with them.

I hoped that this would lead to richer data emerging from the interviews and that this would contribute to a better understanding of the social construction of meaning that gives rise to violence against foreign migrants in South Africa. Also, within a postfoundational research paradigm, the aim is not to generalise, but to describe and attempt to understand the local. Given this aim, my selection of research participants did not seem problematic.

### **1.9.2 Interviews and group reflections**

The research process began with individual interviews to explore people's experiences of foreign migrants living among them and their feelings about these experiences. This was followed by group reflections at a later stage to reflect on what they had told me and on information from the interdisciplinary literature study.

I decided to conduct the interviews before doing a literature study because, as far as possible, I wanted to try to hear the stories of co-researchers and describe their experiences in their context without imposing ideas and concepts that emerge from literature.

An initial series of interviews was conducted in May 2013 I conducted further interviews in June, July, and October 2014. I spoke with the co-researchers again in February and May 2015 to discuss the violence against foreigners that had occurred recently, and to reflect on the research process with them.

## **1.10 Unique contribution**

### **1.10.1 The scapegoating of foreigners**

Antipathy towards foreigners is not a uniquely South African phenomenon. Wodak (2000) notes the rise of nationalistic movements as globalisation leads to increased conflict over space and resources. Wodak investigated parliamentary debates in six Western European countries and showed that common sense argument structures are used to show how immigrants are responsible for social evils. These include:

- Immigrants abuse the system and live at the expense of taxpayers;
- Immigrants are often criminals, and a threat to society;
- Liberal immigration policies promote illegal immigration;
- The jobs of local people are jeopardised by immigrants, who take jobs from them; and
- Immigrants cost too much because there are so many of them.

Wodak (2000) argues that immigrants have become the scapegoats for many of the challenges and socio-economic problems that globalisation has created. The tensions that exist between indigenous people and foreigners in South Africa are therefore not unique. They reflect similar conflicts to those described in Europe, and much of the rhetoric is the same.

However, discourses on foreigners in South Africa have distinctive features that are a reflection of the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, and which seem to be developing in a different direction from those in Europe. This is just one reason why attempting to explain the violence against foreigners in South Africa in terms of a reified notion of xenophobia is problematic.

### **1.10.2 The uniqueness of this study**

Fields (2002) points out that scapegoating involves a combination of reason and unreason, and this suggests the need for a discursive approach to xenophobia. A discursive approach is rare in studies of violence against foreigners in South Africa. There is a tendency to explore the material conditions and then attempt to extrapolate an understanding of the violence as xenophobia from these, as though the material precedes the discursive.

Researchers have tended to focus on possible causes and triggers for the violence (Crush (ed) 2008, Misago, Landau & Monson 2009, Landau (ed) 2012). Within this they have highlighted the role of rhetoric and communication (Crush & Ramachandran 2009) and explored the role certain discourses might play. There has been a focus on elite leadership discourse (Crush (ed) 2008), on mobilisation by local leaders (Misago 2012), and on the role of the media in the discursive creation of foreigners (Els 2013; Banda & Mawadza 2015). There has been little exploration of how these various narratives combine to create certain meanings in society. In all of this research, a reified notion of xenophobia is taken for granted and the violence itself is problematised rather than the construction of meaning that precedes it.

When a reified notion of xenophobia is taken for granted and then offered as an explanation for the violence against foreigners it presents a number of problems:

- It tends to reflect an essentialised notion of xenophobia that is not sensitive to the nuances of the local context.
- By pathologising of violence against foreigners with a label of xenophobia, most research into xenophobia problematises violence rather than the issues that are offered as explanations for such violence (Kerr & Durrheim 2013).
- The word “xenophobia” carries a negative moral judgement that compounds the problem by obscuring the power relations involved in the deployment of the term, and the various interests that the term is used to protect.
- A description of the violence as xenophobia is a thin description of the problem. Thin descriptions do not allow space for the complexities and contradictions of life. Thin descriptions of people’s lives and identities are often created by others, particularly those who are seen as experts or who have greater social power or status (Morgan 2000). Thin conclusions are limiting because they exclude other possible interpretations as well as other options for action.
- The assumptions reflected in the choice of the word become the conclusions of the research. A circular process such as this is limited in offering new insights into the problem.

This research explores the violence against foreigners as the product of discourse. It explores the various discourses reflected in the stories told about foreigners in order to understand how certain meanings are being created in relation to foreigners, and more

importantly – why? What purpose are these stories about foreigners serving? This generates new insights into the causes of the violence, and points to interventions that might re-shape and change meanings around the presence of foreign migrants in South African communities.

When the deployment of a reified notion of xenophobia as an explanation for the violence is avoided, genuine curiosity about the nature of the problem is possible. Is xenophobia the real problem? Or are there multiple real problems that need to be explored in any local context in which violence against foreigners takes place? This research will show that by understanding the way that meaning is being created by the stories that are told about foreigners, new stories can be crafted, new meanings can be created, and new possibilities for action emerge from these.

### **1.11 Ethical considerations**

Smythe and Murray discuss the ethics of Narrative research. They (2000:318) argue that, “research in the narrative study of lives yields information that cannot be dissociated so readily from ones fundamental human values and meaningful life experiences”. This calls for levels of respect, sensitivity and consent that might not be necessary for other research methods.

I was also aware of the challenges presented by a white man interviewing black South Africans. By choosing participants with whom I had spent time building rapport, and who had experienced me as someone who respected them and their stories, I hoped to overcome some of the problems created by a skewed distribution of privilege and power. My preference for Van Huyssteen’s postfoundational approach is also informed by its ability to limit the impact of epistemological racism. I would argue that transversal rationality creates a space where the rationalities of different cultures, as well as different academic disciplines, can intersect and create knowledge.

Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and participants had the option of withdrawing at any point, if they wished to do so. All co-researchers were given an information letter containing details of the research. They signed a consent form, and gave permission to record the interviews. Pseudonyms are used for the names of the co-

researchers in this study in order to maintain a sense of personhood for each of them while maintaining confidentiality.

Copies of the information letter and consent form are included in APPENDIX A.

## **1.12 Limitations and scope**

While this study seeks to understand the social construction of meaning in relation to foreigners, it is not possible to make broad generalisations about ‘what is’ and ‘what works’. The aim of the research is not to prove the generality of the findings, but to describe and reflect on the way that meaning is constructed by the co-researchers in this study.

It is hoped that through the research journey between myself and the co-researchers insights and perspectives will emerge that might apply beyond the local context and illuminate the social processes and dynamics that shape intergroup relations in South Africa.

## **1.13 Research structure**

### **1.13.1 Seven movements**

Müller (2004) has proposed seven movements as a structure for postfoundational research in practical theology:

1. A specific context is described;
2. In-context experiences are listened to and described;
3. Interpretations of experiences are made with co-researchers;
4. A description of experiences as informed by traditions of interpretation;
5. A reflection on God’s presence/absence, as understood and experienced in a specific situation;
6. Description of experience as thickened by interdisciplinary investigation; and
7. The development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local.

This research will make use of the seven movements proposed by Müller, without following

it as a rigid structure. Rather, the seven movements will shape the research process itself, and this will be reflected to a certain extent in the structure of this dissertation.

### **1.13.2 Chapter outline**

In chapter 2 I explain my epistemology and research approach, and its application to this research. Chapter 3 offers a broad social and economic analysis of contemporary South Africa, and locates the research context within this broader context. Chapter 4 describes the stories of co-researchers, as well as their interpretations of these stories. Chapter 5 investigates the Discourses that are reflected in the stories of the co-researchers. Chapter 6 proposes an alternative story to explain the violence against foreigners in South Africa and engages in an interdisciplinary conversation to develop and thicken this alternative story. Chapter 7 offers insights gained from this re-storying of xenophobia that may apply beyond the local. In chapter 8 I reflect on the research process, individually and with the co-researchers.

In this chapter I have described my positioning as a researcher, locating myself in an emerging post-church Christian tradition. My positioning erases any demarcation between the sacred and the secular in my theology, and makes interdisciplinary engagement a critical component of my approach to theology. I have described the research problem that is the focus of this research: how is the violence against foreigners in South Africa being discursively constructed by means of stories about identity and interests? I have touched on the postfoundational, social constructionist epistemology that will be followed in this research and outlined the qualitative, Narrative approach to research that is used. In the following chapter I will describe this epistemology and research approach in more detail.

## CHAPTER 2

### EPISTEMOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACH

This chapter will explain the postfoundational, social constructionist epistemology followed in this research, as well as the qualitative, Narrative research approach that is employed. After locating this postfoundational epistemology within broader epistemological questions and debates, I will develop it with reference to the work of Van Huyssteen (1997, 1998, 1999, 2006) and then explain its suitability for this research. This will be followed by a discussion of the Narrative research approach taken in this research. Finally, a framework of seven movements for postfoundational practical theology, developed by Müller (2004) will be described.

#### 2.1 Postfoundational epistemology

Both my personal journey of faith and my positioning in practical theology lead me to follow Van Huyssteen's (1997, 1998, 1999, 2006) postfoundational approach to epistemology. Van Huyssteen (1997:112) describes himself as operating in the field of philosophical theology. His goal is to reach an appropriate interdisciplinarity between science and theology. In his first major publication, *Theology and the Justification of Faith: Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology* (1989) he articulates an epistemology of critical realism. In his later writing (1997, 1999, 2006) he develops this further and proposes a postfoundationalist theology as an alternative to both foundationalism and non-foundationalism, or even anti-foundationalism.

Van Huyssteen's postfoundational approach is attractive for a number of reasons:

1. It allows for the production of knowledge that is simultaneously meaningful and provisional, recognising the contextuality of knowledge while offering the possibility of knowledge that is intelligible and subject to rational accountability.
2. It is also attractive because of the possibilities it offers for interdisciplinary dialogue. I work in a sphere characterised by interdisciplinarity and one of the goals of this research is

to produce knowledge that reflects an interdisciplinary approach and that can be engaged with from the perspective of other disciplines.

3. Müller (2009) proposes that a postfoundational approach is congruent with social constructionism, and that both reflect the narrative turn in pastoral theology.

4. Van Huyssteen's postfoundational approach is able to account for the rationality of the co-researchers in this study, as well as more explicitly critical forms of rationality, and accommodate the rationality of co-researchers within in a transversal conversation. In this sense it does not privilege expert discourses over local knowledge.

A brief explanation of foundationalism and non-foundationalism will provide a backdrop against which this postfoundational approach can be articulated.

### **2.1.1 Modernism and Foundationalism**

The term *modernism* describes a fairly broad cultural movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was a worldview that emerged from the Enlightenment and developed more fully through a number of post-Enlightenment thinkers. In its time it was regarded as a progressive force for liberating people from irrationality and ignorance by freeing the autonomous, thinking subject from the bonds of authoritative tradition. Scientific positivism, in which knowledge is grounded in empirical facts that are uninterpreted, unquestionable and that have a fixed meaning, became a key feature of modernism.

Broadly speaking, modernist epistemology reflects the following principles:

1. Following Descartes, the quest for certainty starts with doubting everything. Knowledge that is beyond doubt has to proceed from what is absolutely certain.
2. A system of knowledge is then developed from these first principles, in the same way a house is built on foundations.
3. The process of building on the foundation gradually widens the field of what can be known with certainty. It can be extended by conferring certainty on non-foundational beliefs either through deduction or induction.
4. The reliability of sense perceptions is an essential assumption in the relationship between the subject and the object of study.
5. Our language and propositions are able to mirror reality and communicate concepts that correspond to reality itself.

The goal of this approach is to achieve total objectivity through the controlled collection of empirical data from which generalisations or laws can be made through reasoning. This makes knowledge possible that is correct, objective and value-free, or knowledge that “corresponds, is correct, and thus expresses truth in a neutral and controllable manner” (Van Huyssteen 1989:8). Within this approach, scientific rationality came to be regarded as superior to other rationalities because of its claims to objectivity and verifiability.

The relationship between the subject and the object in the Enlightenment paradigm is important. The autonomous, thinking subject approaches the passive object of study to interrogate it. Knowledge of the object is gained through sense perceptions, which are a reliable source of knowledge. Through this engagement the thinking subject forms an idea of the object, which is expressed in a word, or name given to the idea, which is presumed to be identical to the object of study.

Modernism finds a basis for a fixed and objectively existent subject in Descartes's separation between the thinking self (*res cogitans*) and the external world (*res extensa*) (Urmson (ed) 1960:71-77). The self is regarded as a self-contained entity, within a person, which has direct access to the visible world through sensory and mental perception.

The Enlightenment gave rise to epistemological models that were generally characterised by the following:

- rationalism;
- the autonomy of the individual;
- basing knowledge on a foundation of first principles, and the use of induction and deduction to develop knowledge based on a certain foundation;
- realism, or the belief that our theories or models mirror reality;
- positivism, or the belief that knowledge can be scientifically objective and empirically verifiable; and
- metanarratives: models that claim to fully explain and account for all of reality.

This value-free approach to knowledge proceeded from the premise that science should be autonomous, neutral, impartial, non-responsible and non-normative (Stenmark 2006:49).

While there are considerable nuances in its historical development and its content, which

are not fully acknowledged by Van Huyssteen (see Reeves 2013<sup>2</sup>), this system of knowledge could be broadly defined as foundationalism. Foundationalism is an important feature of the epistemology of modernism. Foundational beliefs are self-evident, indubitable, evident to the senses, and in Van Huyssteen's (1999:62) words, "thus being self-authenticating are properly basic (i.e. foundational) for our wider networks of beliefs". Certainty about first principles creates a foundation upon which further knowledge can be built, and through a process of deduction and induction concepts and language about reality are developed that mirror reality itself. Van Huyssteen (1999:217) explains this concept of rationality further, as operating through beliefs in "linear progress, guaranteed success, deterministic predictability, absolute truths, and some uniform, standardized form of knowledge".

These foundational beliefs are then able to serve as starting points for chains of justification. Further theories could then be developed from this foundation, either by induction or deduction (Van Huyssteen 1997:267). The idea of rule-governance is part of the foundationalist concept of rationality (Van Huyssteen 1999:121). For an assertion to claim rational status it must be universally valid and arguments for it must follow specific logical rules. Van Huyssteen argues that such rules are at the heart of foundationalist rationality.

According to Van Huyssteen (1999:23) this subject-centred epistemological paradigm created an age of individualism, rationalisation, technical control and secularisation characterised by a confidence in representational knowledge. Theological foundationalism runs parallel to scientific foundationalism. The starting point could be a self-authenticating belief in divine revelation, or the inspiration of Scripture, or certain assumed orthodox theological doctrines.

### **2.1.2 Anti-foundationalism and Postmodernism**

In recent decades there has been a significant shift or 'turn' away from modernism towards postmodernism. Van Huyssteen (1989) traces the shift towards anti-foundationalism and his analysis is reflected in this section. Postmodernism has given rise to anti-

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<sup>2</sup>Reeves points out that Van Huyssteen's treatment of modernism and foundationalism does not account for all the nuances in the development of approaches to scientific knowledge from medieval times, through the Enlightenment, to the present. However, Van Huyssteen's concern seems to be to trace a broad epistemological trajectory which leads to an epistemological destination of foundationalism in both science and theology. I would argue that Van Huyssteen does this successfully.

foundationalist or non-foundationalist conceptions of rationality in the much the same way that modernism gave rise to foundationalist notions of rationality. Anti-foundationalism is a critique of foundationalist epistemology, which argues for the relativity and incommensurability of knowledge (Baronov 2004:139-140). Non-foundationalism is also a critique of foundationalist assumptions in epistemology, but from the perspective of describing what is not “philosophically tenable” (Thiel 1994:2).

The full impact of this shift may have only become evident in recent decades, but its origins go back to the 19th century. Van Huyssteen (1989, 1997, 1999) describes the history of this shift towards anti-foundationalism. It had its roots in the field of linguistics, particularly in the work of de Saussure and Wittgenstein. This was given further momentum by the critical rationalism of Karl Popper, and then by the paradigm theory articulated by Thomas Kuhn. It became fully developed in the deconstructionism proposed by Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard and others.

The collapse of modernism’s foundationalist epistemology hinged on the dismantling of the equation: idea is equivalent to word is equivalent to object of reality.

First de Saussure developed his theory of the sociology of language. He argued that human language is a social phenomenon, limited to certain uses or expressions of language within certain societies at certain times. Importantly, he pointed out that, within our system of language, signs only refer to other signs; they do not have a necessary or a direct relationship with reality. Since all language is self-referential, meaning is always indeterminate. Since meaning and consciousness do not exist outside of language, all meaning is temporary and relative.

Building on this idea, Wittgenstein developed the idea of “language games” or the arbitrary nature of language as a system of signs. Because all human language is socially determined, and in fact arbitrary, our language does not make objective assertions about reality. Each language use, in each context, is “situated” or socially determined.

This challenged the modernist equation because the word we use to describe an idea or object is part of a system of language that is arbitrary and socially conditioned. All use of language is therefore “situated” within a particular culture, time and place, and universal application is not possible.

Alongside this shift in linguistics, there were shifts in the philosophy of science. Karl Popper made two important contributions to this. First, he criticised the criterion of verifiability used by logical positivists, arguing that no number of identical observations, no matter how numerous, would necessarily lead to a general law that was valid for all similar cases. There can be no final verification if in the future just one observation could disprove such an assumption. Second, Popper contested the possibility of neutral or objective observation. All forms of observation presuppose a point of view, or an expectation, or theory from which such observations become possible. This led him to articulate his view that all observation is “theory laden.” This demonstrated that the points of view from which observations are made are determined by history and are therefore the product of culture.

Objectivity in science is not about verification or falsification, but the ability of competing theories to establish themselves within a specific scientific community. Therefore, objectivity in science is a matter of social convention. As certain theories are shown to be consistently resistant to falsification and subject to confirmation they gradually lead the scientific community closer to the truth, leading to a higher degree of objectivity, but total objectivity can never be achieved.

Popper’s approach of “critical rationalism” was then taken a step further by Kuhn’s paradigm theory. Scientists work with paradigms, which are essentially problem-solving models that view reality in a certain way. They exist within a particular research tradition and are founded on predefined premises. A paradigm includes all of a researcher’s premises and commitments. Popper argued that scientific thought does not progress through an orderly accumulation of theory development, but through a revolutionary process of shocks or scientific revolutions, similar to religious conversions. The change from one paradigm to another is not based purely on rational activity, but on a complex combination of factors that includes historical, social and psychological factors. Paradigm choices cannot be explained by logical criteria alone because the scientist’s personal commitment plays a defining role. Scientific rationality is therefore defined by what a certain scientific community has decided. The idea that science operates with objective rationality is therefore an illusion.

Ultimately, the conclusion is reached that all knowledge is interpretation from within a particular social context. There are no objective facts. All ‘facts’ are interpreted reality and emerge from a particular society, or interest group, or bias. In the post-Wittgenstein and

post-Kuhn eras human knowledge is conceived as an evolving social phenomenon within a web of beliefs where all data are theory-laden, scientific theories are not determined by facts, and science is a cultural and social phenomenon (Van Huyssteen 1997:267).

Van Huyssteen (1997:271) notes that the shift from foundationalism to non-foundationalist has then been taken further by a type of anti-foundationalism, normally associated with theorists such as Derrida and Foucault. A literary deconstruction of texts takes place where meaning is completely destabilised.

Knowledge has become the politics of interpretation. All facts are politically determined. They require deconstruction through interrogating the power play and motives of the interpreter. The whole world is a text, or in Derrida's (1976:158) words, "There is nothing outside the text". There are no 'facts'. There are only interpretations. Everything is part of the signifying system, and there is therefore no independent basis for meaning beyond particular language systems. There is no point of view outside of the self-referential, contingent play of language.

Working within the same anti-foundationalist approach, Lyotard (1984) articulated a social deconstructionism that was highly suspicious of metanarratives and sought to reveal the social construction of meaning and "objectivity". Foucault (1977) further suggested that all interactions are really expressions of power relations, with specific strategies for claiming legitimacy.

Anti-foundationalism expresses what Lyotard (1984: xxiv) describes as "incredulity towards metanarratives," or total explanations of reality. There are no universally valid descriptions of reality. Every human description of reality is situated, including the propositions of natural science. For Lyotard (1984:60), a scientist is a person who "tells stories". Science is socially constructed like any other form of contextual knowledge.

### **2.1.3 Foundationalism, non-foundationalism and theological research**

Foundationalism presents problems for this research. According to the modernist criteria for rationality - certainty, objectivity, and universality - theological reflection is a form of irrational activity (Wildman 2006:32). However, foundationalism fails to recognise the subjective and contextual aspects of knowledge. This leads to a quest for certainty and universality that can lead to reductionist accounts of reality and methodological imperialism. The absolutism of foundationalism prevents any openness to other viewpoints. In this way,

as Müller (2009:202) points out, foundationalism makes interdisciplinary work very difficult because it requires knowledge from other disciplines to be assimilated within its own framework.

Foundationalist assumptions of gradual, incremental progress can also be problematic. Van Huyssteen (1999:126) argues that the revolutions that have taken place in scientific research demonstrate the failure of foundational epistemologies. Truths are not always accumulated in a linear, incremental manner that builds on some foundational starting point, but often through revolutions that are disruptive in nature.

Anti-foundationalism presents problems for research because it rejects any truth claims, relegating theology to the realm of total relativism. Non-foundationalism is also unable to differentiate between superior and inferior rational activity. Furthermore, non-foundationalism's premise renders its conclusions meaningless. As Meyer (1994:42) points out, Richard Rorty wrote a four hundred page book to show the non-cognitive character of philosophy and hence the futility of philosophical argument. But, if Rorty believes what he is writing, what is the point of reading his four hundred pages? Or, to use Meyer's (1994:42) example, Nietzsche and Foucault "were persuaded that truth is no more than a rhetorical device employed in the service of oppression". This raises the question: What is the status of their claim? If we read their works, do we become the objects of oppression?

Meyer (1994:87) argues that non-foundationalism involves the fallacy of pure projection. This fallacy is seen in its most extreme form in the self-reversal of deconstructionists such as Derrida. In everyday life we cannot live by doubting that the world 'out there' is real. If it is not possible to assume, in some meaningful sense, that what we communicate is heard and received by other people, there could be no literature, education, or commerce. All these are based on the assumption that meaningful communication has taken place - even though it may not be perfect communication. Yet the epistemology of pure projection reverses this reality of life. Meyer (1994:40) describes the problem as follows:

In our ordinary living we cheerfully draw on the world in a thousand ways, yet in our formal philosophical efforts we may line up one reason after another against acting, against even the possibility of acting in this way.

Meyer points out that this self-reversal makes a completely self-contradictory statement: "I am stating what is really and truly so when I say that we cannot know what is really and

truly so". For Meyer, Wilbur's cryptic remark epitomises the contradictory nature of postmodern epistemology, "We milk the cow of the world, and as we do, we whisper in her ear, 'You are not true'" (Meyer 1994:43). The inherent contradiction of absolute relativism makes meaningful research virtually impossible.

Barton (1998:17) points out that, "In all sorts of contexts we operate quite uncomplicatedly with the idea that words have definite meanings, and postmodernists do the same when they read everyday texts: instruction booklets that come with household equipment, legal documents, personal letters conveying information, shopping lists or cookery books".

The absolute relativism and incommensurability of knowledge in non-foundationalism limits the scope of knowledge and research to the local and subjective to such an extent that they become virtually irrelevant. Within a non-foundationalist paradigm, subjecting knowledge or beliefs to critical inquiry is pointless because there is no common basis for communication, and no way to judge between competing claims. In this way all beliefs are protected from criticism. This is fine if one wants to shield one's beliefs from outside scrutiny, but it makes interdisciplinary work impossible.

A non-foundationalist approach also does not seem to offer possibilities for research that leads to meaningful social change. If the world and everything in it is a text that has no possibility of coherent meaning, then all we are left with is competing power plays. We remain isolated in the sanctity of our discourse-dependant perspective, unchallenged by other perspectives and discourses. The loss extends beyond the realm of ideas to the realm of relationships. If relationships are built around disclosure and knowledge, the loss of meaning in non-foundationalism has dire consequences for the possibility of authentic relationship. As the authors of *The Meaning of Meaning* point out, language is the most important instrument of civilisation, and if there is nothing in what we say to one another we lose the primary means for cultivating humanity (Ogden & Richards 1989: xviii).

## **2.2 Postfoundationalism**

A Postfoundational approach avoids the naïve realism of foundationalist approaches, without surrendering to the absolute relativity of non-foundationalist approaches. It is suspicious of foundationalism's claims of objectivity and representational knowledge, and of non-foundationalism's assertion of complete relativity. In Van Huyssteen's (2006:22) words

it tries to find a balance between, “the way our beliefs are anchored in interpreted experience, and the broader networks of beliefs in which our rationally compelling experiences are already embedded”.

Van Huyssteen’s postfoundational approach positions itself between modernism and postmodernism. Wildman’s description of Van Huyssteen’s position is helpful:

His postfoundationalist account of rationality shares the sensitivity of postmodernism to the terrible way certainty, objectivity, and universality can function as powerful clubs to suppress unwanted and awkward viewpoints, particularly those of socially and economically oppressed portions of humanity that tend to challenge the political and economic status quo. It also shares modernism’s interest in taking account of the success of the natural sciences. Yet it does this without supposing rationality is either a matter of epistemic certainty and universality or a self-deceptive struggle against the strangulation of unlimited relativism (Wildman 2006:32).

In order to explain Van Huyssteen’s Postfoundationalism I will discuss his understanding of critical realism, rationality, transversality, and his proposals for postfoundational theology.

### **2.2.1 Critical realism**

A critical issue for any attempt to find a middle ground between foundationalism and non-foundationalism is that of language and meaning. Van Huyssteen (1997:129-130), following developments within the scientific community, adopts a position of critical realism which contends that language does refer to *something* and therefore there is a limit to relativism.

Van Huyssteen (1997:44) explains what both “critical” and “realism” mean within this approach to knowledge. Epistemology must be critical by affirming that:

In their respective quests for intelligibility, the scientific and theological enterprises share alike the groping and tentative tools of humankind: words, ideas, and images that have been handed down, which we refashion and reinterpret for our context in the light of contemporary experience.

He explains realism as follows:

‘Realism’ in ‘critical realism’ thus refers to the attempt at reliable cognitive claims about domains of reality that lie beyond our experience, but to which interpreted experience is our only epistemic access.

For Van Huyssteen (1989:130), theological statements engage in more than just meaningful symbolism, through what he calls the “cognitive and realist element of religious language”. Critical realism then, is completely aware that all our knowledge is gained through interpreted experience in a particular social and linguistic context (*critical realism*) but it still asserts that theological statements are descriptive of reality (*critical realism*). Simply put, there is a reality out there that exists independently of our interpretations, but we can only access that reality through our interpreted experiences. Shared, meaningful knowledge is therefore possible.

## **2.2.2 The nature of rationality**

### *2.2.2.1 Rooted in evolutionary biology*

Van Huyssteen’s (1998) views on the nature of human rationality arise from an understanding of the evolutionary basis of human rationality in terms of which human knowledge results from organic evolution. The study of evolution contributes to an understanding of the phenomenon of human knowledge. The ability humans have to know their world and themselves in self-consciousness has clear biological roots. He writes:

The basic assumption of evolutionary epistemology is that we humans, like all other living beings, result from evolutionary processes and that, consequently, our mental capacities are constrained and shaped by the mechanisms of biological evolution (Van Huyssteen 1999:4).

He argues that this includes concepts such as common sense and human rationality, which are genetically programmed at a deep level in our brains (1998:138). Intelligence and rationality are needed to make sense of our world and our relationships, and as a result of the evolutionary process they have become a defining feature of humanity.

Based on his understanding that human rationality is rooted in the need to survive or adapts to the environment, Van Huyssteen argues that the ability to interact with the world and understand it is fundamental to human intelligence. It follows that whatever discipline human intelligence is applied to, the nature of rationality will be the same. This in turn leads to his conclusion that “evolutionary epistemology, rightly understood, has to lead to and imply an interdisciplinary account of our epistemic activities” (Van Huyssteen 1998:142).

The desire and ability to know and understand the environment and the human tendency to form religious beliefs have both been embedded in the human mind since the emergence

of human intelligence. This position, derived from evolutionary epistemology, is contrary to the modernist view, where human intelligence applied to science is all objectivity and rationality, but where human intelligence applied to religion is all subjectivity and irrationality. Since rationality is part of what it is to be human, no discipline can claim that it alone has a valid strategy for reasoning. Evolutionary epistemology demonstrates that scientific and theological rationality operate in very similar ways.

#### *2.2.2.2 The Rational Agent*

A crucial feature of Van Huyssteen's postfoundational approach is his focus on rational *agents* rather than rational *beliefs*. Rationality is primarily a characteristic of people and its application to beliefs is derived from this (Reeves 2013:136). Rational beliefs, contextuality, personal commitments and rhetoric merge to form the rational agent. Van Huyssteen (1999:154) explains that a rational agent is, "someone with an acute self-awareness, someone who is consciously embedded in the concrete, living traditions of our various cultural domains and diverse reasoning strategies". Rationality and context are therefore inseparable. Van Huyssteen (1999:145-146) explains further that the rational agent's judgement is *conditioned* by context, rather than *determined* by context, and that thought that transcends context is possible.

The rational agent makes rational judgements, which are, "... the ability to evaluate a situation, to assess evidence and then come to a responsible and reasonable decision without following any pre-set, modernist rules". Therefore rational agents are individuals who possess a sufficient quantity of information that is relevant to the judgement in question (Van Huyssteen 1999:143-144).

#### *2.2.2.3 Rationality*

Rationality is the human capacity to construct beliefs about reality. This is something that all humans do, leading Van Huyssteen (1999:145) to use the phrase, "the shared resources of human rationality". Rationality is the product of human evolution, and is the product of context, interpreted experience, and tradition. For Van Huyssteen (2006:11), rationality is always contextual because it only exists as people live with other people in concrete contexts, situations and traditions.

Van Huyssteen (1999:30) suggests that the philosophy of science provides a helpful source for a general epistemology for the human sciences. His starting point is Kuhn's

proposal that theory formulation took place within paradigms. This was developed further by Lakatos and Laudan in their description of “research programs” or “research traditions”. Postfoundational rationality, being context-specific, is embedded in traditions. Van Huyssteen (1999:267) points out that theological rationality differs from scientific rationality, and there are no universal standards of rationality that can be used as an ultimate reference point to adjudicate between competing traditions or disciplines.

The same is true in all disciplines: statements can be theory laden, provisional and metaphoric, yet simultaneously reality depicting. Van Huyssteen (1989:153) writes, “The scientist as subject, the metaphor-maker is now recognized as an inseparable part of the scientific endeavour”. The acceptance of a theory does not imply that it is literally true. Instead, scientific models develop and move towards an approximation of truth. There is some kind of “fit”, however provisional, between the structure of the theory and the structure of reality - a groping towards reality. For Van Huyssteen (1989:154), this form of theory formulation, “while honoring the provisionality and socio-historical nature of all knowledge”, also “enables us to retain the ideals of truth, objectivity, rationality, and scientific progress”.

Van Huyssteen (1999:114) explains further that “the nature of human rationality is to be found in the way that we use our intelligence to pursue particular epistemic goals and values, of which intelligibility may be the most important”. Intelligibility does not imply a quest for conclusive foundations, but rather to make responsible judgements (1999:115). Intelligibility and optimal understanding are both the goals of rationality and its litmus test. While there are different ways to offer good reasons in different contexts, these twin goals of rationality shape the way we interact with the world (1999:143). Rational people are those who pursue optimum understanding of the world and who are able to offer a convincing rationale for what they propose to be true. Rationality entails the ability to offer a cogent explanation for what we believe, choose, and do. In order to be rational beliefs must be based on appropriate and carefully considered evidence. This is what makes certain beliefs more rational than non-rational or irrational beliefs (1999:132).

More than this, rationality is the ability to propose suitable solutions to the problems in a specific context. The problem-solving abilities of a theory determine its rationality and any mode of reflection can be deemed to be rational if it provides adequate and appropriate solutions. Here Van Huyssteen follows Laudan’s proposal that theories should be

evaluated in terms of their problem-solving abilities (Van Huyssteen 1999:165-66). For Laudan, intellectual progress is made when unsolved problems are solved through responsible judgement and adequate choice of theory (Van Huyssteen 1999:167).

Scientific rationality is different from other forms of knowing in degree and emphasis, but all forms of human knowledge are attempts to grapple with different but equally real aspects of human experience (Van Huyssteen 1997:13-14). This means that there is a multiplicity of disciplines that can participate in the problem-solving process, and this shared value of progressive problem-solving allows for contextually aware interdisciplinary conversation (Van Huyssteen 1999:173).

While all human knowledge is always contextual, knowledge statements are attempts to refer to some reality and describe it. While a scientific theory cannot claim to be a direct representation of reality, its truth is judged by its ability to have predictive success, and where, as it is refined, it is shown to be increasingly accurate and in that sense it is *something like* the real world. Van Huyssteen (1999:144) argues that rational judgement is an epistemic skill. Just like a physical skill, it needs to be developed and internalised. It is also not infallible and mistakes can be made.

Following Nicolas Rescher, Van Huyssteen's concept of rationality merges the cognitive, evaluative and pragmatic dimensions. Veldsman explains this well,

Van Huyssteen takes up the three resources of rationality which he identified, namely the cognitive (finding good reasons for hanging on to certain beliefs), evaluative (finding good reasons for making certain moral choices) and pragmatic (finding good reasons for acting in certain ways) context. Although the former (that is, the cognitive) is more dominant, the latter two are regarded as of the same importance (Veldsman 2004:282).

Rhetoric is used to show that beliefs and actions are reasonable. Following Schrag (1992), Van Huyssteen (1999:133) argues that rhetoric combines the cognitive, evaluative and pragmatic aspects of rationality, thereby making intersubjective conversations possible.

This argument for the shared resources of rationality is critical for this study because it recognises that all forms of rationality, including theological rationality and the rationality of the co-researchers in this study, operate in the same way. The local knowledge of co-researchers is also derived from the same epistemic processes of making sense of life and finding solutions to problems within a particular context. This epistemic levelling creates a

space for engagement between various rationalities that does not privilege expert knowledge and discourse over local knowledge.

### 2.2.3 Transversality

Van Huyssteen has a deep concern, which is shared by this research, to create a framework in which theology is able to engage in conversation with other disciplines. For Van Huyssteen (2006) both theology and science are embedded in traditions where interpreted experience shapes epistemic values. Interdisciplinary dialogue is possible because the same resources of rationality are shared across disciplines. Areas of agreement and disagreement can be explored and as this occurs, traditions can be criticised and reshaped.

Van Huyssteen's postfoundational approach offers significant possibilities for interdisciplinary research. He (1999:117) argues that the post-Kuhn era has removed any sharp line of demarcation between scientific rationality and other forms of rationality. Rather, all forms of human rationality are the same. There is now a blurred distinction between the natural and the human sciences, "since the same kind of interpretive procedures is at work in all our varied, and often widely divergent, reasoning strategies" (Van Huyssteen 1999:44-45). There has been a kind of "epistemological levelling" (Van Huyssteen 1997:271) by which science is no longer regarded as being superior to other disciplines, or necessarily distinct from them.

Van Huyssteen points out that all our knowledge, including direct experiential knowledge, is expressed in language, which already embodies theoretical presuppositions:

It is clear that on such an account there is going to be no significant epistemological difference between the interpretations of the empirical world and interpretations of human beings and their practices and institutions; all of these belong in the same way to our theoretical networks of beliefs about the world, and both are shaped by our worldviews, by social practices of language use, and by the epistemic and non-epistemic values that shape our behaviour (Van Huyssteen 1999:47).

Van Huyssteen (1999:135) borrows the mathematical concept of transversality from Schrag (1992) and explains that it refers to the point of intersection between one line and a system of other lines or surfaces. Transversal rationality is an intersecting of different disciplines or discourses. Van Huyssteen describes it as a lying across, an extending over and linking together. It is a place of convergence in space and time where multiple beliefs,

practices, habits of thought and assessments come together. Transversality creates a space between foundationalist approaches, which ignore the human component of rationality, and non-foundationalist approaches which exaggerate the contextual nature of human rationality.

Osmer (2006) points to significant differences between the correlational, transformational and transversal models of interdisciplinary dialogue. Unlike the transformational approach, which pictures disciplines as distinct language games, the transversal approach argues for a more fluid and dynamic relationship between disciplines - they are regarded as networks that transverse one another and share the same resources of rationality. The transversal model is similar to the correlational approach, but, based on its recognition of the ubiquity of pluralism, it insists on more concrete forms of interdisciplinary dialogue than is typical with correlational approaches.

In his study of comparative philosophy, Jung (2011) shows that transversality dispels all forms of ethnocentrism. It is intercultural, interdisciplinary, and intersensorial. Transversal rationality is therefore highly suited to research that wishes to understand the stories of people from different cultural contexts through a dialogue with multiple disciplines.

The postfoundational approach engages with postmodernism in a constructive manner, by agreeing with it that there are no universal epistemic systems and all of our experiences are interpreted experiences (Van Huyssteen 1999:116). A break from foundationalist epistemology makes interdisciplinary conversation possible (Van Huyssteen 1999:128). Transversal rationality “facilitates a multiperspectival approach to dialogue, where rationality exists in the intersecting connections and transitions between disciplines” (Van Huyssteen 2006:20).

Van Huyssteen (1999:136) argues that transversality is crucially important in the postfoundationalist approach because it reveals the shared resources of human rationality. Claims of reason can be located within the overlaps of rationality between different groups, discourses, or reasoning strategies.

He adds:

A postfoundationalist notion of rationality thus creates a safe space where our different discourses and actions are seen at times to link up with one another, and at times to contrast or conflict with one another. It is precisely in the hard struggle

for interpersonal and interdisciplinary communication that the many faces of human rationality are revealed (Van Huyssteen 1999:139).

Transversal spaces are safe for interdisciplinary conversation. They are overlapping spheres of discourse that have common epistemic strategies (Van Huyssteen 1999:139).

Schrag (2006:20) points out that through his use of transversality, Van Huyssteen is able to describe how rationality can be used in philosophy, science, and theology in a way that avoids the modernist claims of unity and universality and postmodernism's rejection of rationalism in favour of heterogeneity, particularity and incommensurability. Van Huyssteen (2006:16) argues that transversal rationality eliminates the tendency to unify different kinds of knowledge. Scientific knowledge cannot be viewed as superior to other forms of knowledge.

This research will explore the spaces where different disciplines converge and where productive interdisciplinary dialogue can occur. Müller (2011) notes Van Huyssteen's (2007:421) point that transversal reasoning is not an arbitrary matter of opening oneself up to certain viewpoints and closing oneself off to others, rather it creates an epistemic space in which interdisciplinary critical evaluation can take place with optimal understanding as its goal. There are natural boundaries between disciplines and there needs to be an awareness of degrees of transversality.

Müller (2011) borrows the concept of an *ecotone*, a transition area between neighbouring but different communities of plants or animals, as a metaphor for Postfoundationalist Theology. In an ecotone, two communities meet and integrate, but there is also a wider variety of species found in this transitional zone in what is called the "edge effect". For Müller, the fragile public space created in interdisciplinary dialogue is the practical theologian's ecotone. It is a space where practical theology can explore a number of diverse narratives, allowing multiple habitats to be visited and re-visited. The rationalities that are uniquely part of each discipline allow each habitat to be explored, but they are also able to communicate with each other on the basis of transversality. Müller's metaphor of the ecotone echoes the notion of liminality introduced in the previous chapter.

The application of transversal rationality to practical theological investigation is rich with possibilities. Such a dialogue, and the deconstruction and critique it offers, could facilitate the emergence of deeper understanding, more accurate descriptions, and transformative action in the contexts to which it is applied.

## 2.2.4 Postfoundational theology

Van Huyssteen (1997:165) argues that theology pursues knowledge that is as secure as possible in order to construct theories that offer the best possible explanations. This goal shapes the rationality of theology, but it depends on the approach that is used to justify the cognitive claims made within theology. Since both science and theology are attempts to understand and explain reality, the rationality of science is directly relevant to that of theology.

Van Huyssteen (1999:113) articulates a postfoundational theology that he argues is able to fully acknowledge, the role of context, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience, and the way tradition shapes the values that inform our reflection about God and God's presence in the world.

Van Huyssteen (1997:4) explains the dual contribution made by Postfoundationalism by pointing out that while it acknowledges the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience and tradition in theology, a postfoundational notion of rationality is also able to point beyond the local context and engage in meaningful interdisciplinary conversation.

Müller (2005:6) proposes certain minimum requirements for a postfoundational practical theology. It should be:

- locally contextual;
- socially constructed;
- directed by tradition;
- exploring interdisciplinary meaning; and
- pointing beyond the local.

Van Huyssteen (1989:157) argues that theology and scientific enquiry operate in the same basic way; both share the “groping tools” of human understanding. Descriptive models indirectly redescribe reality. They are not literal pictures, but they are more than merely useful fictions. Van Huyssteen follows Laudan, who showed that scientific theories are not favoured in terms of justification or falsification, but because they are effective in solving a problem in a given context. Scientific progress is gauged by the extent to which effective solutions have been found for hitherto unsolved problems.

Theological statements do not provide full descriptions of reality. They make provisional and tentative models of reality, and have value to the extent that they provide better explanations of problems that require a solution. Van Huyssteen (1989:161) argues that theological statements must be able to critically identify real problems and formulate theories that might offer applicable solutions to those problems. This means that theologians need to identify issues that qualify as real problems and develop valid solutions to these problems.

Van Huyssteen suggests types of theological problems that could be candidates for valid problem-solving analysis, but he focuses on issues that relate to systematic theology, such as confessional statements and historic doctrines, and does not explore problems related to practical theology or biblical theology, for example.

I find this description of the problem-solving role of theology compelling, both from my positioning within practical theology and in terms of its applicability to this study. The nature of the problems I explore in this study might seem somewhat removed from typical theological concerns, but my positioning leads me to regard these problems as central to practical theology, and ecclesial problems and concerns as relatively peripheral.

## **2.2.5 Implications for this research**

This research explores violence against foreigners within a local context. It explores the construction of meaning with regard to the presence of foreigners in communities, and particularly how these foreigners represent a problem to those who consider themselves to be indigenous. Rather than assume a reified notion of xenophobia as the explanation for the problem of violence against foreigners, this research attempts to gain optimum understanding by exploring the problem from an alternative perspective. This approach is taken in order to make better judgements about the problem(s) and seek better solutions.

Transversal rationality allows the participation of multiple disciplines within this process. The shift from modernism to postmodernism demonstrates that scientific and theological rationality operate in similar ways. There are important epistemological overlaps between scientific and theological rationality:

- the quest for intelligibility;
- the quest for optimal understanding;
- responsible judgement skills; and

- progressive problem-solving (Van Huyssteen 1997:13-14).

Both scientists and theologians construct methodologies that are appropriate to their disciplines and contexts and that will serve their quest for intelligibility and optimal understanding (Van Huyssteen 1999:116). This understanding of theology is important for this study. As a theologian I reflect on human experience and try to make sense of it in order to understand problems better and identify better solutions to them.

While this study is interdisciplinary in nature, as a practical theologian, and particularly as a Narrative practical theologian, I bring certain assumptions and a certain method to my investigation of human experience and to the problem. Recognising the limits of transversality, it is possible that these assumptions and methods could bring new insights and better solutions. This desire for optimum understanding and finding better solutions to problems reflects my positioning in practical theology, described in chapter 1.

### **2.3 The social construction of reality and a Narrative approach**

My approach to research results from my agreement with Van Huyssteen's postfoundational approach and Müller's proposals for postfoundational practical theology.

In chapter one I stated my choice of a qualitative approach to research, which seeks to interpret and understand the meanings given to phenomena by people in a particular context. Within this broad approach I chose to use a Narrative research method, based my understanding that knowledge is socially constructed and that people's words create their worlds.

This research does not claim to follow an objective, value-free approach. As a researcher I am an active participant, not merely an observer, in the process. My own values, assumptions, interests, and questions have played a role in the research process. They influence what questions I ask, and which of the co-researchers' answers I choose to explore in more depth. Burr (1995:160) describes this understanding of research, "Researchers must view the research as necessarily a co-production between themselves and the people they are researching". While I have chosen the research question and determined the broad parameters of the research, I will work with co-researchers to

interpret their stories and elicit the reflections of co-researchers during and at the end of the research.

The aim of this research is not to make generalisations or universal truth claims about the issues it explores. It will produce knowledge that is dependent on context (Gergen 1985:272).

The research approach taken in this study will be explained with reference to social constructionism, poststructuralist notions of discourse, and the Narrative approach developed by White and Epston that reflects these.

### **2.3.1 Social constructionism**

Social constructionism (Berger & Luckman 1966; Burr 2003; Crotty 1998; Gergen 1985, 2001; Hacking 1999; Harré 1986; Potter 1996) offers an explanation for the processes by which people describe, explain and give an account for the world in which they live. The term describes a group of approaches to knowledge that view our ways of understanding reality as negotiated and constructed in social interactions between people (Burr 1995:4; Gergen 1985:267). Our knowledge is created and maintained through social interactions such as communication, negotiation, conflict and rhetoric (Burr 2003; Gergen 1985). Through this socially constructed knowledge people come to understand the world around them and define 'reality'. This means that people construct their social and cultural worlds while these worlds simultaneously construct them.

According to Gergen (1985:266), social constructionism challenges positivist-empiricist claims that scientific theories are direct representations of reality. Rather, they are the product of social interchange. Science does not represent reality; it is the product of linguistic practices and social interaction in a community that is shaped by certain rules within the frameworks of various scientific discourses. It is driven by social, economic and political concerns as much as it is motivated by a search for truth. Scientific knowledge is socially constructed in the same way as other contextual knowledge. This recognition brings the dimensions of multiplicity and marginality into the process of knowledge production. Science is merely one narrative, one way of attempting to use language to explain reality. There are many other legitimate ways to do this.

Reality does not consist of a single objective truth that can be discovered by positivistic scientific inquiry. There are multiple realities that are constructed social processes and

these compete for truth and legitimacy. Taken for granted realities in society are the products of interactions between social agents (Hacking 1999). In these interactions meanings are contested and negotiated and consensus is formed to create structures that are simultaneously stable and open to change (Giddens 1984). We act as if these structures are real (Gioia 2003:189), but they are actually produced intersubjectively.

Constructionism locates the processes of knowledge creation in a social context, overcoming the subject/object dualism constituted by modern science. In Anderson and Goolishian's words, (1988:372), "Meaning and understanding are socially and intersubjectively constructed". The particular social and cultural context in which we exist shapes the way we make sense of our world. As we communicate, using shared language and meanings, we construct reality. From a social constructionist perspective, words determine the meaning of reality rather than reality determining the meaning of words. This means that reality cannot be described in a decontextualised way. Freedman and Combs explain:

The main premise is that the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws, divisions of labour, and the like that make up our social realities are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another from generation to generation and day to day. That is, societies construct the lenses through which their members interpret the world (Freedman & Combs 1996:16).

With the social constructionist paradigm, individual selves are manifestations of relationships within society. Epistemologically speaking, society precedes any construction of individuality (Gergen 1987:61; Schrag 1997:78). Relationships provide the language and the framework to talk about self (Gergen 1991:157). Gergen (1987:63) explains this using the analogy of language. Just as individual words can only be understood within their linguistic context, individuals can only be understood within their social context.

Social constructionism recognises the key role of language and communication in the production of meaning (Pearce & Cronen 1980; Cronen 2001; Barge & Little 2002). Language is not simply a transmission of meaning, it is the medium through which the construction of meaning takes place. This means that language does not mirror reality, it constitutes it. Berger and Luckman (1966) have shown how subjective meanings can achieve the status of reality through the processes such as typification, institutionalisation, legitimation, and reification so that they become widely accepted in a society as 'correct' ways of being (see also Freedman & Combs 1996:24-25).

We make sense of our lives and our world through the social context in which we exist. Geertz (1973:434) argues that, “the imposition of meaning on life is the major end and primary condition of human existence”. This process of individual meaning making results in self-stories that are social constructions in the same way that reality is socially constructed. The construction of self-stories is not a private matter, narratives are subject to social sanctioning and negotiation (Burr 1995:137).

### *2.3.1.1 Implications for this research*

A social constructionist approach necessitates fundamental doubt of taken for granted descriptions of the world. It takes the constituting effects of language and power relations in society seriously. Therefore this study focuses on the social construction of meaning in communities in order to understand the violence against foreigners. It is not only suspicious of the way in which the notion of xenophobia is harnessed to describe the problem, it rejects an essentialised notion of xenophobia as an explanation in favour of a contextual investigation of the creation of meaning with regard to foreigners.

### **2.3.2 Language and Discourse**

Earlier in this chapter, in the section on postmodernism and non-foundationalism I described how the modernist illusion that language provides a stable link between subject and object has been shattered. Poststructuralism has demonstrated that language is not an accurate representation of reality; there is no direct link between the subjective world of thoughts and language and the objective world of reality. We live immersed in language and only have access to ourselves and the world through it. As Anderson (1995:30) puts it, “Language is reality”.

The language in which we live simultaneously makes possible the understanding and knowledge that we have and limits it. As people live together in a particular context they generate meaning and knowledge through their use of language. Within this broader use of language, the concept of ‘Story’ is the key to our understanding and experiencing of ourselves and the world in which that self is situated (Socor 1997:17).

Discourses are the ongoing conversations that take place in a society, over time, through which that society comes to agreement about what constitutes reality. Savage and Presnell (2008:44) define discourses as, “organized ways of behaving that provide frameworks for

making sense of the world”. Individuals are engaged in various social discourses and take positions in them.

Following Alvesson and Kärreman (2000), it is helpful to distinguish between two senses in which the notion of discourse is used. The term ‘discourse’ (little ‘d’) is used to describe talk and text in ordinary social practice. The term ‘Discourse’ (big ‘D’) is used to refer to broader and enduring systems of ideas, assumptions and talk within a historically situated context. These discourses are systems of thought and ways of thinking about things that function as linguistic resources for people when they communicate (Foucault 1977).

Michael Foucault (1984:59) proposes that knowledges and discourses are produced by changing social structures. He argues that ‘truth’ is not something unchanging that can be discovered. Rather, it is something that is produced through social discourses. Dominant Discourses determine the rules by which truth is separated from falsehood. In this way power is attached to what is construed as true (Foucault 1984:74).

Discourse is constructed from pre-existing linguistic resources such as words, categories, idioms and repertoires. These resources are used in different ways, resulting in a variety of accounts of the world, and these accounts of the world can be described in a number of ways (Wiggins & Potter 2008). By drawing on linguistic resources and using language in various ways, people construct their own versions of the world.

Because dominant Discourses define the boundaries of what is regarded as true in any society, they can be internalised by people with the result that what they believe about their stories and identities is shaped by this dominant narrative (Epston 1993:170-173). To the extent that these dominant narratives prevent people from living out their preferred stories, or disempower people, they create problems in their lives. The ‘truth’ of dominant Discourses defines what personhood should be, and pushes them towards compliance with this. The internalisation of dominant narratives can create problems for people by marginalising them or excluding them or turning them into objects. People are given labels that totalise them and diminish them (White 1995:43).

### *2.3.2.1 Implications for this research*

This study explores both the construction of meaning and identity as products of Discourse. It explores the discourse of co-researchers in terms of their everyday talk and language about foreigners. It attempts to identify dominant Discourses that shape this everyday talk

and that provide resources for the creation of meaning with regard to foreigners living among them.

When the creation of meaning is explored this way it has the potential to deconstruct taken for granted explanations of the violence against foreigners, and expose the power relations that are involved in the deployment of such explanations. On this basis it is able to illuminate the problem(s) related to violence against foreigners in a manner that points to possible solutions that are marginalised by narratives of xenophobia.

### **2.3.3 A Narrative approach**

#### *2.3.3.1 Life as story*

Hans Frei put it succinctly: “To be human is to have a story” (in Placher & Hunsinger (eds) 1993:208). A Narrative approach to research is congruent with a postfoundational epistemology because it begins with the contextually situated stories of people.

The Narrative approach was pioneered by Michael White and David Epston over thirty years ago as they developed respectful and collaborative practices for working with people in counselling and therapy. The scope of Narrative work has since been expanded beyond the therapeutic setting to include, among others, community work, organisational development, and theology. Narrative inquiry applies the principles of the Narrative approach to research.

Michael White’s (1991) words capture the essence of the Narrative approach; he asks “What’s in a word?” - and answers “A world!” The Narrative approach follows social constructionism in affirming that words create worlds. This understanding of the relationship between language and the world goes back at least as far as Wittgenstein (1922), who said, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world”. Polkinghorne describes the centrality of stories in human experience:

Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, with the stories that we dream or imagine or would like to tell. All these stories are reworked in that story of our own lives which we narrate to ourselves in an episodic, sometimes semiconscious, virtually uninterrupted monologue. We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed (Polkinghorne 1988:160).

Bluck and Habermas (2000) proposed that the life story is a schema that expresses the autobiographical relationship between individual events and provides an overarching structure for a narrative that has temporal, causal and thematic consistency. Coherent self-stories provide stability, locate the self contextually in time and space, and integrate the individual's life experience and self-concept, thereby creating a sense of a self that has purpose (McAdams 2006).

### *2.3.3.2 Stories and meaning*

Humans are meaning making machines (Kegan 1982). Ricoeur (1984:3) argued that narrative makes experience significant and meaningful to people. We are creatures who look for meaning in events in order to make sense of life. In Puchalski's (2006:272) words, "We are constantly taking appraisal of our environment and inner states and ascribing some inherent meaning to it".

The process through which people make meaning is linked to autobiographical memory. As people recall and reflect on these memories they arrive at a sense of meaning in life (Beike & Crone 2012). As Swart (2013:1) writes, "We live in a world where how we speak, what we speak and the stories we tell define and become who we are". What we think of as 'real' and 'true' are really constructed narratives in which sequences of events, which have been linked and then interpreted to give them meaning.

Morgan (2000:8) points out that people's lives are multi-storied because different stories occur simultaneously and different stories can be told about the same event. Swart (2013:24, 61) argues that there is a multiplicity of narratives because multiple interpretations are possible for what we experience in life, and that our life narratives are fictional in the sense that they are created through our interpretation and meaning making. Nevertheless, they shape people's experience of their lives, identities, histories and futures.

The ways that people understand their lives are shaped by the broader stories of the culture in which they live. This context, which includes gender, class, race, culture, and sexual preference contributes to the interpretations and meanings that people attach to the events in their lives through their stories (Morgan 2000:9).

Swart (2013:24) points out the role that taken for granted ideas and beliefs play in the meaning making process, as well as cultural stories. They form an additional layer of

meaning that contributes to the understanding of how things are, and why they are that way. They inform our narratives and shape what we believe is possible.

### *2.3.3.3 Stories and the future*

The extent to which our stories shape our future is captured in an article called *The Power of Language and Stories* from the February 2003 edition of *Prevention* magazine:

We don't describe the world we see; we see the world we describe. Language has the power to alter perception. We think in words. These words have the power to limit us or set us free; they can frighten us or evoke courage. Similarly, the stories we tell ourself about our own life eventually become our life. We can tell healthy stories or we can tell horror stories. The choice is ours (Prevention 55, February 2003, p. 139, cited by Savage & Presnell 2008:35).

Savage and Presnell describe the way narrative shapes our lives and our futures. Functional meanings are discovered in the way things relate to each other; this includes human relationships. These meanings are organised and communicated in story form. The elements of multiplicity, discordance and succession of experience are configured into a story by narrative. This recognition is significant, because reimagining the way a story is configured can change a future. They write, "A story intends a future. It contains recognition of what has happened and possibility of what is to come" (Savage & Presnell 2008:43).

### *2.3.3.4 Narrative work and problem stories*

Narrative work creates distance from stories that could be called problem stories, which are often the dominant stories in the lives of individuals and communities (Swart 2013). People become trapped in problem stories that limit what seems possible in their lives and communities and diminish hope for a better future. These problem stories are usually thin descriptions of reality (Geertz 1973).

People's stories often reflect thin descriptions of their lives. Thin descriptions do not allow space for the complexities and contradictions of life. Thin descriptions of people's lives and identities are often created by others, particularly those with the "power of definition", who are seen as experts or who have greater social power or status (Morgan 2000:12-13). Thin descriptions lead to the development of thin conclusions about their identity and/or future possibilities that develop from their stories. These thin conclusions become limiting because they exclude other possible interpretations as well as other options for action.

Stories with thin descriptions that lead to the development of thin conclusions can have a negative effect on people's lives.

Morgan (2000:13-14) argues that once thin conclusions are accepted, it becomes easy for people to find evidence that supports them. In this way the impact of problem saturated stories becomes greater and greater. This can result in the problem story obscuring people's knowledge, skills, and abilities and leaving them feeling trapped and hopeless. Problem stories can have an enormous impact on a person's or community's future.

#### *2.3.3.5 Externalising language and problem stories*

The Narrative approach does not locate problems within people. Problems stand distinct from and in relationship to the people who face them (Swart 2013:28). Problems need to be named and externalised in order for the person's relationship with the problem to be revised (White & Epston 1990:38-76). This means that people are not totalised with labels that identify them with their problems. Instead, both the problem itself as well as the relationship that people have with the problem is seen as the problem, and this is explored. The creation of distance between the storyteller and their problem opens up possibilities to choose alternative narratives.

Externalising language is used to speak about the problem in a way that creates distance between the problem and the person (Morgan 2000). Narrative work will trace the history of the problem and its influence in the person's life. The way the problem operates or manifests itself can be explored. Tracing the history of the problem makes it possible for thin descriptions and conclusions to be recognised. It also opens up a space in which people are able to articulate different stories about the problem (White 1993; Morgan 2000:33-38).

The effects of the problem need to be explored in order for the impact of the problem story on a person's life to be fully understood. This is important for two reasons. First, it acknowledges the pain and distress that the problem has caused. Second, it makes it possible to discern times where the problem has not been influential.

#### *2.3.3.6 Unique outcomes*

The production of alternative stories is achieved through a thick or rich description of people's lives and relationships. These unique outcomes need to be identified (Morgan

2000:40-41). These unique outcomes or “sparkling moments”, which may be beliefs, events, feelings, thoughts, actions or ideas, are the starting point for the discovery of alternative stories (White 1995; Morgan 2000:45-58).

As these unique outcomes are brought to awareness they create possibilities for new stories. As more of them emerge and as they are explored and given meaning, a thicker description of the person's life emerges. Inquiry is made into the landscape of actions around the unique outcome through questions such as “When did this happen?”, “Where did it happen?”, “What happened before? (or afterwards)” (Morgan 2000:61). Exploration of the landscape of actions creates new possibilities for the person's landscape of identity. White describes this exploration of new meaning:

As they talk about certain events they will indicate what they think those events reflect about the character, motives, desires and so on, of various persons in their social networks. They will also reflect upon what these events say about the qualities of particular relationships. So, the landscape of identity or meaning has to do with the interpretations that are made through reflection on those events that are unfolding through landscapes of action (White 1995:31).

When we examine our stories with the understanding that our reality is created through language, and in relationship to others, we become open to the possibility of alternative stories. Narrative work helps people explore their preferred stories. Morgan (2000:14) writes, “The therapist is interested to seek out, and create in conversations, stories of identity that will assist people to break from the influence of the problems they are facing”.

Furthermore, when people are given the opportunity to tell their stories in a respectful space it opens up possibilities for them to explore their stories and consider the multiple meanings and ideas that might emerge. New stories can be constructed that move away from the thin identity conclusions that people have developed from their old stories. Lindemann Nelson (2001:xiii) uses the term “counter-story” for this, and describes them as “tools designed to repair the damage inflicted on our identities by abusive power systems”.

Once an alternative story is named it can be explored and thickened. It can be a challenge for people to internalise emerging alternative stories and hold onto them.

#### *2.3.3.7 Narrative approaches and power*

A Narrative approach recognises the existence of power relations, and the effect they have on human interactions. Michel Foucault proposed that people with knowledge and power

give others “the gaze”: “it is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish” (1977:184). This gaze makes people feel as though they are constantly being scrutinised to see if they measure up to standards of “normality”.

There is a deliberate move away from expert discourses to a “not knowing” position that regards the client as the expert on their life and story (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). Questions are asked out of curiosity to help the story teller explore their words and meanings in order to construct new knowledge jointly with the listener.

#### *2.3.3.8 Implications for this research*

Morgan (2000:129-30) lists a number of assumptions that inform Narrative ways of working and that are reflected in this research:

1. The problem is the problem (the person is not the problem).
2. People have expertise on their own lives.
3. People can become the primary authors of the stories of their own lives.
4. Problems are constructed in cultural contexts.
5. The problems that people experience usually result from thin conclusions about their lives and relationships that often make them believe that they are deficient in some way.
6. There are always occasions in people’s lives where they have escaped a problem’s influence.
7. Those involved in Narrative work have a responsibility to create an atmosphere of respect, curiosity, and transparency.

The label of xenophobia identifies the problem with one of the parties involved. This pathologising of the problem and linking it to people obscures the problem. It marginalises people’s own knowledge of the problem by dismissing it as myth (Crush (ed) 2008). While the apportionment of blame is facilitated by the label of xenophobia, this obscures the power relations involved in the deployment of the term.

The label of xenophobia represents a thin description of the problem and the lives of the people affected by the problem. By taking a not knowing position as a starting point, and listening to people’s stories with curiosity, this research produces a thicker description of the problem. It also helps people to recognise and explore the occasions when the problem has not been dominant; this points to possible solutions.

As a Narrative practitioner I will document the stories that I listen to, acknowledging that this is my own retelling of the stories that might challenge or change the original story (Swart 2008:58). I will, however, obtain feedback from co-researchers in order to present their stories as accurately as possible.

Within this Narrative approach, I will follow Swart's (2013:56) guidelines for Transformational Questioning, which have been shaped by Hancock and Epston (2008):

- It is transparent, as storytellers are given the reasons, purpose and direction of the conversation;
- It grows from the vocabulary of the conversation, that is the language, text, ideas, stories, replies and questions;
- It cannot be prepared in advance and is freshly constructed;
- It flows from the reply and the context of the conversation;
- It seeks the help, assistance and participation of the storyteller;
- It respectfully appreciates the ideas of the storyteller;
- It creates equal participation, where the questioner is led by the storyteller and the storyteller is led by the curiosity of the questioner;
- It seizes the imagination;
- It separates and detaches the person from the problem;
- It explores the richness and multiplicity of stories;
- It invites people to respond with willingness, excitement, and readiness to participate; and
- It carries and conveys the fascination and curiosity of the questioner.

## **2.4 Seven movements for postfoundational research in practical theology**

The postfoundational epistemology and Narrative approach of this study are reflected in its use of Müller's (2004) seven movements for postfoundational research in practical theology. Müller has developed a postfoundational practical theology that reflects Van Huyssteen's postfoundationalist approach. Müller (2004:300) proposes a research process that involves seven movements, as described in the following table.

POSTFOUNDATIONALIST THEOLOGY	POSTFOUNDATIONALIST PRACTICAL THEOLOGY
<p>“... a <b>postfoundationalist theology</b> wants to make <b>two moves</b>. First, it fully acknowledges <b>contextuality</b>, the epistemically crucial role of <b>interpreted experience</b>, and the way that <b>tradition</b> shapes the epistemic and non-epistemic <b>values</b> that inform our reflection about God and what some of us believe to be <b>God’s presence</b> in this world. At the same time, however, a postfoundationalist notion of rationality in theological reflection claims to <b>point creatively beyond the confines of the local</b> community, group, or culture towards a plausible form of <b>interdisciplinary conversation</b>” (Van Huyssteen 1997:4).</p> <p>(Phrases in bold reflect Müller’s emphasis)</p>	<p><b>The context &amp; interpreted experience</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A specific context is described.</li> <li>2. In-context experiences are listened to and described.</li> <li>3. Interpretations of experiences are made, described and developed in collaboration with “co-researchers”.</li> </ol> <p><b>Traditions of interpretation</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. A description of experiences as it is continually informed by traditions of interpretation.</li> </ol> <p><b>God’s presence</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. A reflection on God’s presence, as it is understood and experienced in a specific situation.</li> </ol> <p><b>Thickened through interdisciplinary investigation</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. A description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation.</li> </ol> <p><b>Point beyond the local community.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. The development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community.</li> </ol>

I have followed Müller’s seven movements as a basic structure for this study. They take the co-researchers and their life world seriously. They also enabled me to do research *with* the co-researchers rather than *on* them, and this enabled us to engage in the construction of meaning together. Interdisciplinary investigation locates the stories of co-researchers within broader research traditions, and thickens the descriptions of their stories.

### **2.4.1 A specific context is described**

The broader context of this research is post-apartheid South Africa. This context is described and then explored more narrowly by focusing on two communities in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, the rural Nxuba Municipal District, consisting of Bedford and Adelaide, and the urban city of East London.

#### *Methods used*

- A contextual analysis is undertaken in order to describe post-apartheid South Africa and the research context in the Eastern Cape, particularly as it is experienced by co-researchers.

### **2.4.2 In-context experiences are listened to and described**

The stories of people's experience of foreigners were listened to in order to understand what the presence of foreign migrants in these communities signifies.

#### *Methods used*

- Interviews were conducted using a Narrative approach.
- People were interviewed in both the rural and urban contexts.

### **2.4.3 Interpretations of experiences are made, described and developed in collaboration with co-researchers**

This research moves beyond descriptions of the experiences of co-researchers and attempts to understand the meanings that they have attached to these experiences.

#### *Methods used*

- Interpretation of stories and the development of meaning was carried out in collaboration with the co-researchers.
- In line with the Narrative approach, externalising language was used to describe problem stories.
- Feedback loops allowed the co-researchers to reflect on the research with me and to verify that I represented their stories and meanings accurately.

#### **2.4.4 A description of experiences as it is continually informed by traditions of interpretation**

Discourses within the context that have emerged from the co-researchers' experiences and perceptions are explored. Attempts are made to discern these discourses and discover how they influence behaviour.

##### *Methods used*

- I examine and analyse discourses in literature, the media, and various research traditions.

#### **2.4.5 A reflection on God's presence, as it is understood and experienced in a specific situation**

This research does not assume that a lack of explicit awareness of God's presence signifies the absence of God's presence. I was curious about the perceived absence (or irrelevance) of God as I was about experiences of God's presence.

##### *Methods used*

- I listened for cues in people's narratives that suggested an experience of God;
- These experiences were explored for their significance and meaning.

#### **2.4.6 A description of experience, thickened through interdisciplinary investigation**

This research engages in an interdisciplinary dialogue that reflects the transversal rationality proposed by Schrag and Van Huyssteen. This dialogue engages with Social Psychology, Organisational Psychology and Political Science.

##### *Methods used*

- A literature study was undertaken.
- Academics from the above disciplines were invited to reflect on part of the research from the perspective of their discipline. I used the questions developed by Müller (2009) to facilitate this reflection.

## **2.4.7 The development of alternative interpretations that point beyond the local community**

In line with Müller (2004:304) this research attempts to “allow all the different stories of the research to develop into a new story of understanding that points beyond the local community, not in an effort to generalise, but to deconstruct negative discourses”.

### *Methods used*

- Workshops and focus groups were held with the co-researchers.
- Alternative interpretations that emerge in this research were explored, and their possible significance discussed.
- Publication in academic journals will be undertaken.
- Dissemination will take place within various communities, such as the scientific community, communities of faith, NGO's, policy-making organisations.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explained the postfoundational epistemology and Narrative research approach that is taken in this study. I argue that both the epistemology and the research approach are congruent and highly suitable for the investigation of the research problem. In fact, I would argue that the absence of either my postfoundational epistemology or my Narrative approach would weaken my exploration construction of the violence against foreigners as a product of discursively created meaning.

The following chapter will reflect Müller's first movement for postfoundational research in practical theology, in which a specific context is described.

## CHAPTER 3

### UNMET EXPECTATIONS AND HOPE DEFERRED: A STORY OF SOUTH AFRICA'S POOR

#### 3.1 Introduction

According to Müller's (2004) approach, the first step in postfoundational practical theology is the description of a specific context. I am aware that there are multiple stories that could describe life in South Africa in the second decade of the twenty first century. The narrative that follows is by no means the only one that could be told, but in it I attempt to reflect the way that life in South Africa is experienced by the co-researchers in this study. This presents a challenge because my own experience of life in South Africa, as a middle class white person, is far more positive. My relative affluence and privilege shields me from the deprivation and challenges faced by co-researchers. In order to overcome this challenge my description will draw from the experiences of co-researchers, as well as literature that describes what they experience and thickens their descriptions.

The context for my research can be described at various levels. The broadest of these is the post-apartheid South African context. This chapter will start with a brief description of this. It is a context characterised by massive inequality, systemic poverty, endemic unemployment, and huge challenges in the areas of health and education. It is also a context with a long history of violence. From the violent dispossession of colonialism and apartheid, to the violence of the struggle against it and the violent repression of that struggle, to the violent crime and interpersonal violence that is recorded daily, violence is endemic to South African society and its history. This broader culture of violence has included ongoing violence against foreigners, particularly those from other parts of Africa.

Within this broader context, this research takes place in the Eastern Cape Province, and particularly in two municipalities within that province. One of these municipalities is urban and the other is in a rural area. These local contexts, which are a microcosm of the broader South African context, will be described.

## **3.2 The broader post-apartheid South African context**

For the co-researchers in this study, poverty is the defining feature of life – most often a bleak, grinding, hopeless poverty. South Africa is a society still haunted by the poverty and deprivation that are the legacy of its apartheid past. The social engineering of apartheid, given impetus by the full power of the state, was highly effective in creating a country that was ordered along racial lines (Seekings 2007b:20). It has also created a society that is characterised by profound inequality (Seekings 2007a:2). Black South Africans were deprived of land, and influx control policies pushed them to the often inhospitable peripheries of cities and towns where access to transport and other infrastructure was poor. They were provided with low quality education and other state services. Job reservation policies favoured whites and black South Africans had very limited access to capital and economic opportunities. Pieterse (2003:105) writes that “South Africa remains a profoundly unequal and violent country, especially if you happen to be poor”.

### **3.2.1 The economic environment: Inequality and poverty**

#### *3.2.1.1 Systemic Poverty*

While a Western understanding of poverty tends to conceptualise it mainly in financial terms, its impact on people’s lives is greater than simply a lack of money. Woolard (2002:2) cites a 1997 study that investigated perceptions of poverty among the poor in South Africa. Poverty included:

- the absence of support from family and community;
- food insecurity;
- crowded homes;
- a lack of safe and efficient energy sources;
- a lack of secure, adequately paid jobs; and
- fragmentation of the family.

Woolard (2002:2) lists further challenges associated with poverty: a lack of access to water and sanitation; economic exploitation; homelessness, and vulnerability.

A 2008 study that used a poverty line of R515 per person per month found that 54% of the population of South Africa could be classified as poor. When the poverty line was

increased to R949 this figure increased to 70% of the population (Woolard, Leibbrandt & McEwen 2009:98).

### *3.2.1.2 Income inequality*

Woolard (2002:1) describes how, in South Africa, extreme poverty and hunger exists alongside extravagant affluence and wealth. The Gini Coefficient measures the distribution of income in a country and is an indicator of inequality. A Gini Coefficient of zero would represent complete equality (everyone getting the same), and one would represent complete inequality (one person getting everything). Inequality has actually risen since 1994 (Van den Berg, Louw, & Du Toit 2007). In 2009, South Africa's Gini Coefficient was 0.631. This indicator of economic inequality compared badly with that of other emerging economies such as India (0.334), China (0.425), Russia (0.401) and Brazil (0.547). It has been argued that, when government grants and the free water and electricity provided by government are taken into account, South Africa's Gini Coefficient improves slightly (Bosch, Rossouw, Claassens & du Plessis 2010), but it would still be high at 0.62. In 2014 South Africa's Gini Coefficient was 0.72, making it one of the most unequal societies in the world (Cronje 2014).

Among those employed, black South Africans earned only 13 cents for every rand earned by white South Africans. Of South Africa's 14.7 million households, more than 7 million spent less than R1799 a month. While only 0.8% of white South Africans were poor in 2012 (if poverty is defined as per capita income of less than R1450 a month), 42% of black South Africans fell into this category. In 2013, based on the standard poverty line of 45 US dollars a month, more that 45% of South Africa's population remained trapped in poverty (Bhorat 2013).

### *3.2.1.3 Unemployment*

Cronje (2014:54-55) highlights some of the challenges that South Africa faces in the economic sphere. In 2013 the unemployment rate was 26%, but more tellingly, the percentage of people of working age who were either employed or actively looking for work was just 62% for men and 50% for women (see also Bernstein 2014). The global economic downturn of 2007 had a significant impact on South Africa, with hundreds of thousands of South Africans losing their jobs in the years that followed it (Hofmeyer (ed) 2009:1). A report by the Institute for Race Relations indicates that the unemployment rate for black

South Africans is four times higher than for white South Africans. Also, while the percentage of people who are unemployed has remained fairly stable, the actual number of unemployed people has almost doubled between 1994 and 2013 (Ndebele 2013).

White South Africans continue to dominate better paid jobs; in 2013, over 75% of managers in companies employing more than 50 people were white (Ndebele 2013).

#### *3.2.1.4 Access to housing and basic services*

Since 1994 the number of households with access to housing, water and sanitation has increased dramatically. The number of households living in formal houses has increased by 5.4 million, with similar increases in access to electricity and clean water. In 2012 71% of South Africans were living in formal housing, compared with 53% in 1996. This progress has been remarkable and has improved the quality of life of many South Africans. It has also increased expectations of further service delivery, and has been the cause of frustrations in areas where service delivery has been poor (Managa 2012).

#### *3.2.1.5 Reflections on the economic environment*

The violence that has erupted against foreigners in South Africa must be viewed as a product of a context of extreme poverty. That is not to suggest that poverty automatically produces such a response, but to recognise the exigencies of life at or below a basic subsistence level. Within a context characterised by such high levels of poverty, the stakes are high. It is difficult to not conceive of the economic sphere as one of zero-sum competition in which any possible opportunity or advantage needs to be guarded jealously. Perceptions of lost jobs, or of opportunities that have been usurped by outsiders will result in anger – whether these perceptions are accurate or not.

### **3.2.2 The social environment**

#### *3.2.2.1 Health and healthcare*

Woolard (2002:1) estimates that 25% of adults, or 13% of the population are HIV positive. Russell (2009:203) points out that, with a population of around 50 million, South Africa has more people living with HIV and AIDS than any other country in the world. Since 1994 the life expectancy in South Africa has declined from 66 years to 51 years. This is not only due to the prevalence of HIV and AIDS, but can also be attributed to the policies of the African National Congress (ANC) government in response to it. Although I did not enquire about

specific health problems experienced by co-researchers, two of them spoke to me about their struggles with tuberculosis. Others spoke to me about the deaths of parents and other family members upon whom they had depended economically.

South Africa has made progress in dealing with its HIV/AIDS crisis. Nearly one million South Africans are receiving anti-retroviral treatment from the state, and two thirds of infected mothers are receiving treatment to prevent mother to child transmission. However, there are still between 350 000 and 500 000 new HIV infections every year and it is estimated that about five million more South Africans will be infected by 2030 (Navarro, Bekker, Darkoh & Hecht 2010).

Whiteside (2014) points to four areas that represent challenges for health in South Africa. The first area is health care delivery and policy. Public health facilities are under pressure, and a lack of service delivery is exacerbated by poor administration and mismanagement. A second area of concern is the growth in non-communicable diseases (NCD's). Common examples include stroke, heart attacks, diabetes, cancer, asthma and depression. Some of the major NCDs are preceded by unhealthy behaviour followed by the emergence of risk factors. Over the past two decades the risk profile of South Africans has deteriorated significantly with regard to NCD's (Bradshaw, Steyn, Levitt & Nojilana 2011). A third area identified by Whiteside is the pressure placed on health services by migrants and refugees. The final area is environmental change that is leading to more frequent droughts and threatening food security and nutrition.

### *3.2.2.2 Education*

Badat and Sayed (2014:128-30) point out that in 1982 the apartheid government spent an average of R146 educating a black child, while it spent an average of R1211 on a white child. This massive disparity was reflected in the quality of education and the provision of infrastructure. This resulted in massive backlogs after 1994. In 1996 it was estimated that 65380 additional classrooms were needed, 60% of schools had no access to electricity and telephones, 35% had no potable water, and 47% of schools had pit latrines as school toilets. The authors note that twenty years later the right to learn has a hollow ring for many.

While the government has developed more equitable funding policies for schools, and schools have been desegregated, many schools remain under-resourced and unable to deliver quality education. Spaul (2013:3) speaks of a crisis in education, "with the

exception of a wealthy minority – most South African pupils cannot read, write and compute at grade-appropriate levels, with large proportions being functionally illiterate and innumerate”.

Cronje (2014:59) notes that in 2012 only 39% of adults had completed high school and only 6.5% had any tertiary education. In addition to this, he points to the fact that the World Economic Forum ranked the quality of school education in South Africa 146<sup>th</sup> out of 148 countries. Bernstein (2014:36-8) documents a number of studies that indicate that South African learners perform poorly compared to those in other countries, and rank near the bottom of most international measures. The majority of learners do not reach appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy.

Despite government attempts to distribute resources more equally to schools there is still inequality in the quality of education as well as access to it. This is seen in a National Senior Certificate pass rate among white pupils of around 97% mark since 1994, compared to a pass rate among black pupils of 63%. Only 7% of the black adult population has any form of post-school education, compared to more than 30% of white adults.

The crisis in education is significant for this study because it results in many South Africans lacking the levels of education and skills to compete successfully in the job market or to identify and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities (Bernstein 2014). This places them at a disadvantage compared to more highly skilled foreign migrants.

### *3.2.2.3 Social assistance*

A report from the National Treasury (2013) shows that in 2013 just over 16.5 million people were benefiting from social grants. Social grants account for just over 3% of South Africa’s Gross Domestic Product, making the country proportionately the largest spender on social welfare in the world. These grants are seen by government as a mechanism to direct resources towards the poor and as an expression of social solidarity.

These grants have certainly played a role in reducing poverty (Jensen 2004; Leibbrandt, Woolard, McEwen & Koep 2010). A UNICEF (2012) study shows that these grants have resulted in improved educational, nutritional and health outcomes for children. However, Coetzee (2011) found that there was no evidence of improvement in health or educational outcomes and that the cash received may be actually spent on the beneficiary.

Woolard, Harttgen and Klasen (2010) show that the decline in poverty levels since 1994 can be attributed to the expansion of social grants rather than through increased participation in the economy or economic growth.

All of the co-researchers in Nxuba were beneficiaries of some form of social assistance, either in the form of child support grants, or through the Community Works Programme, which pays a stipend for part time cleaning and maintenance work done by participants in their communities. All but three of the co-researchers from East London depended on similar forms of social assistance.

#### *3.2.2.4 Social cohesion*

According to Lefko-Everett (2012:15), 25% of South Africans see the gap between rich and poor as the greatest division in their society, and only 13% see race as the most significant issue that keeps people apart.

Lefko-Everett (2012:15) cites a study conducted by the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and the Gauteng City-Region Observatory in 2011 that explored how South Africans felt about the idea of non-racialism. The study found that South Africans are attached to the idea of race and use their race to describe their identity. Despite increased social contact at work and in the public sphere, most South Africans still felt uncomfortable inviting people of other races into the more private spaces of their lives. The study showed how misconceptions, stereotypes, and generalisations are still prevalent. Fear, suspicion, and intolerance was expressed in many of the focus groups.

17.8% of South Africans socialise regularly with people of other races, 21.6% do this sometimes, and an alarming 56.6% rarely or never socialise across racial lines (Lefko-Everett 2012:43). Lefko-Everett (2012:43) notes that, "Levels of socialisation, and the development of stronger relationships across race lines, are consistently lower in successive survey rounds". There is an increased cynicism among the youth, and while a desire to build a unified country does exist there are doubts that this can be achieved while deep inequality still exists (Lefko-Everett 2012:49).

South Africa remains a society in which ethnicity and particularly class are the lenses through which difference is constructed. The social problems that this creates are reflected in reactions to the influx of foreign migrants, many of whom are ethnically distinctive and many of whom achieve a level of economic upward mobility.

### 3.2.2.5 *Crime*

South Africa has been labelled the “world capital of crime” (Altbeker 2007:33), and the prevalence of crime is compounded by the brutal violence that often accompanies it. The newspapers contain daily reports of car hijackings, violent rapes, farm murders, lynching by mobs, cash-in-transit robberies and more. While it is difficult to get accurate crime statistics, South Africa’s murder rate consistently ranks in the top two or three countries in the world. Violent crime as a proportion of overall crime is unusually high in South Africa (Glaser 2008:335). Altbeker (2007:130) argues that, “... socio-economic conditions in South Africa, though always likely to produce crime, cannot tell us why South African crime is as violent and pervasive as it is”.

The various discourses on crime in South Africa include dismissals of the claimed levels of crime as nothing more than an expression of white paranoia and loss of privilege, blaming crime levels on apartheid and poverty, perceptions among South Africans that the Constitution and Bill of Rights protect criminals, and the idea that illegal immigration is the cause of a lot of crime (Glaser 2008:335-7).

Crime in South Africa is a complex subject and its causes and levels are contested and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore this. Glaser (2008) gives an overview and critique of the various positions. He traces the history of crime in South Africa, and also notes the correlation between high levels of inequality and violent crime (see also Leggett 2005).

Post-conflict societies can experience levels of violence that are greater than the violence during conflict (McNeish & Lopez Rivera 2012; Dodge 2012). Schuld (2013) points out that post-conflict societies like South Africa continue to experience violence once the conflict has ended, and argues that the difference between political violence and crime is conceptual rather than empirical.

### 3.2.2.6 *Violence*

South Africa is a country steeped in violence. Von Holdt writes:

Violence is not new to South Africa. Colonialism and apartheid were violent systems, marked not only by the violent domination of white settlers, the coercive institutions of the mining industry, and their state, but also by the violent responses of the dominated – including a diversity of intra-black violent repertoires within

subaltern communities and formations such as vigilantism, gang violence and faction fighting. Historical patterns of violence continue, albeit with altered meanings in the substantially different symbolic universe of democracy, alongside new patterns of violence specific to the emergence of democracy (Von Holdt 2013:591).

The violence of the apartheid system and the political violence that dominated black residential areas in the 1980's and early 1990's have played a role in creating a violent society (Simpson 2004; Emmett 2000; CSVR 2009). Russell (2009:115) reflects on the violence that is endemic to South Africa, "It is hard to avoid concluding that centuries of race-based repression, applied for the last half of the twentieth century with scientific and brutal rigor, embedded a culture of violence ...".

In the South African context, Galtung's (1969:175) distinction between structural violence and direct violence is important. Structural violence is created by inequality, especially in the distribution of power, and it breeds direct violence and the infliction of physical violence. Although structural violence is less visible, its pervasiveness in the levels of poverty and inequality in South Africa offer insight into the country's high levels of direct violence (Clark 2011:80).

Various other explanations are offered for high levels of violence in South Africa, including the proliferation of firearms, increased activity by organised crime syndicates, an ineffective criminal justice system, substance abuse and gangsterism (Schönteich & Louw 2001).

It has been argued that South Africa has developed a "culture of violence" in which violence is endorsed and regarded as a legitimate way to solve problems, achieve goals, and achieve justice (Kynoch 2005). I will argue that violence against foreigners is an expression of this broader culture of violence, and that within such a culture, violence and the use of force are afforded legitimacy as a means for solving the 'problem' of foreigners.

### *3.2.2.7 Anger and protest*

Since the middle of the 2000's South Africa has experienced an increasing number of localised community protests about a lack of "service delivery" from the state (Alexander 2010). This "massive rebellion of the poor" (Alexander 2012), has recruited a "new generation of fighters" (Alexander 2010:25). Groenewald (2012) argues that South Africa has become the protest capital of the world.

The dysfunctionality of local government structures, along with poor performance from

elected representatives has resulted in many communities experiencing poor service delivery. This has been the cause of anger, resulting in community protests (Booyesen 2009; Allan & Heese 2011; Hough 2009). Visser, Powell, Staples and Gilliland (2012:5) argue that, “protests are not only increasing in frequency, but are also far more likely to turn violent”. Akinboade, Mokwena and Kinck (2014:3) point out that where protests become violent criminals may exploit the situation.

The 2012 Reconciliation Barometer showed an increased approval of participation in protests such as demonstrations and strikes, and the use of forceful measures to bring about change. Trust in leaders is declining and people believe that corruption is taking place in their communities. One in five people under the age of 35 were involved in some form of violent protest in the year preceding the study (Lefko-Everett 2012:25, 49).

Von Holdt (2011) points out that although xenophobia attacks are different from community protests in many respects. They involve the same or similar organisations, they share common repertoires, both are examples of popular collective agency and violence, and both involve complaints about a lack of state action. Furthermore, community protests often lead to some form of violent action against foreigners in that community.

### *3.2.2.7 The influx of foreigners*

Foreign migrants started to arrive in South Africa after 1994. Their number increasing in the late 1990s around the time of the passing of the Refugees Act in 1998, and again around 2005 with the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. Census data from 2011 shows a dramatic increase in the number of foreign migrants living in informal settlements since 2001 (Monson 2015). This influx resulted in South Africa being the number one host of new asylum seekers in the world between 2006 and 2011 (UNHCR 2012).

The 2010 Fact Sheet from the Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP 2010) provides some figures on the number of foreign migrants in South Africa for the period up to the end of 2009:

- There were 47 596 recognised refugees since 1994.
- There were 32 344 economic migrants with work permits in 2007/8 (excluding those with corporate permits).

- There were 223 324 new applicants for recognised asylum seeker status. Of these, 4,567 were approved, 46,055 were rejected and 172,702 became part of a backlog of unprocessed cases.
- There were 312 733 people deported in 2007/8 (this number is likely to have decreased in subsequent years, following a moratorium on the deportation of Zimbabweans that was introduced in April 2009).
- The total foreign population (documented and undocumented) was estimated to be between 1.6 million and 2 million, based on extrapolations from census data.

2013 Figures from Statistics South Africa indicated that there are just over 55 000 migrants from Africa living in South Africa with temporary residence permits, and 4555 with permanent residence permits (STATSSA 2013). The numbers increase for registered refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees global report (UNHCR 2013:118) provides a figure of just over 220 000 asylum seekers, mainly from Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Somalia and Zimbabwe, who were registered as refugees in this country in 2011.

During the 2015 attacks against foreigners, an official from the Department of Home Affairs gave parliament a report on the numbers of foreign nationals working in South Africa. Between 2010 and 2015, he said, there were 889 943 foreigners working legally in the country between 2010 and 2015, and approximately half of these had work permits. Within that total figure there were 104 332 refugees, 273 563 asylum seekers, and 77 398 people with permanent resident status. More than 300 000 of the total number of foreign nationals had stayed longer than the time legally permitted (Davis 2015).

While it is difficult to get accurate figures for the number of documented migrants, it is impossible to get them for undocumented foreign nationals. Their number was estimated to be about five million in 2010 (Mabudusha 2014). Other estimates range from 200 000 to eight million. The massive difference in estimated figures indicates the difficulty of measuring the actual number of undocumented migrants living in South Africa.

A report by the Southern African Migration Project in 2006 revealed that 84% of citizens believed that South Africa was admitting too many foreigners. The same study revealed high levels of support for vigorous efforts by citizens to eject foreigners (Crush (ed) 2008).

### 3.2.2.7 Reflections on the social context

It is not surprising that a massive influx of foreigners is perceived to be a problem by people living in a context where the basic services upon which they depend are already under threat. The outsiders are perceived to be a drain on already scarce state resources. In communities already reeling from the impact of crime, foreigners are perceived to be agents of criminal activity. Violence against these outsiders could be regarded as almost inevitable in a context where difference has historically been the basis for exclusion and oppression, and violence a legitimate tool for solving problems and achieving goals.

### 3.2.3 Violence against foreigners

2008 saw the outbreak of violence against foreign migrants living in townships and informal settlements around South Africa. While such incidents were not new, the intensity and pervasive nature of the 2008 violence was unprecedented. In the period between 11 and 26 May, 62 foreign nationals were killed, around 700 injured, and an estimated 35 000 foreigners were driven from their homes. A detailed account of the May 2008 violence is provided by Misago, Landau and Monson (2009:24-28).

The 2008 violence against foreigners represented an intensification of antipathy towards foreigners that had been documented since 1994, and which had resulted in incidents of violence against foreigners before 2008. Misago et al (2009:23-24) provide a list of recorded attacks on foreigners between 1994 and the May 2008 attacks.

Foreigners were perceived to be involved in crime, taking economic opportunities from South Africans, and placing an undue strain on government resources. Statements from focus groups conducted in informal settlements around Johannesburg echo some of these explanations (Everatt (ed) 2010:7):

- foreigners are morally bankrupt;
- they “make babies with our sisters and then run away after that” (African woman 36-45);
- they were “sucking on our system” (African woman 36-45);
- “these guys from outside ... commit crime” (African man 26-35);
- “they are the ones who commit so much rape” (African woman 50-59);
- “they sell everything we want to sell” (African man 36-45).

There was a decline in anti-foreigner sentiment between 2008 and 2010, but continuing instances of violence against foreigners have been documented (Crush, Ramachandran & Pendleton 2013), which might not have been occurring at the levels of May 2008, but which suggest that the issues that were catalysts in 2008 are far from resolved. Crush et al (2013:52-69) document a staggering number of xenophobic incidents and attacks between July 2008 and the beginning of 2013. Violence against foreigners continued to simmer in settlements around South Africa in 2013 and 2014, sometimes escalating into organised attempts to force foreigners to leave communities, often by attacking their businesses or taking their possessions from them.

Attacks on foreigners broke out in Gauteng in January 2015 and then again in Kwazulu-Natal in April 2015. The latter were allegedly prompted by a speech made by Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini at a moral regeneration event in Pongola on 20 March 2015. Zwelithini's speech was followed by a large-scale outbreak of violence against African foreign migrants in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, where most of South Africa's approximately six million Zulus live (The Herald 2015; Khoza 2015). The violence spread to parts of Gauteng, particularly Alexandra, where it was immortalised by the photographs of Mozambican Emmanuel Sithole being murdered (Tromp & Oatway 2015).

### **3.2.4 Reflections on the South African context**

The dominant theme with regard to their experience of South Africa from co-researchers was one of frustration: frustration that their lives had not changed since 1994; frustration that they lived in poverty; frustration that they had not received houses and other services; frustration that they were unemployed and that prospects of employment were remote; frustration at the levels of crime in their communities; frustration that they felt neglected by a government that had promised them a better life; frustration that their voices were seemingly not heard by those in power.

Along with the frustration there were feelings of disappointment and disillusionment. The promised better life continued to elude them. It was available to some; to white South Africans, to an emerging and increasingly visible black middle class, and to those foreigners in their communities whose lives reflected a trajectory of economic upward mobility. Within a context where violent protest has a long history as a political tool, frustrations caused by unmet expectations and hope deferred is likely to escalate.

### 3.3 The Eastern Cape

The Eastern Cape is a microcosm of this broader South African context, although its status as one of the poorest, least developed provinces in the country tends to amplify many of the issues.

The Statistics South Africa census figures for 2011 (STATSSA 2011) provide insight into the Eastern Cape, and particularly how it compares with other provinces. The province is home to 6 562 053 people living in 1 687 385 households. 67% of the population are under the age of 35 and 57% of the population are under the age of 30. Comparisons with other South African provinces reveal that the Eastern Cape has:

- the lowest percentage of adults with matric (20%);
- only 8% of adults with some form of post-school education;
- the lowest percentage of people living in formal dwellings (63.2%);
- the lowest percentage of households that own a working computer (11.9%);
- the lowest percentage of households that own a working refrigerator (53.9%);
- the lowest percentage of households with access to the internet (24.1%);
- the lowest percentage of households using electricity for cooking and heating (46.6%);
- the lowest percentage of households with access to piped water within their yard (49.4%);
- the second highest unemployment rate after Limpopo (37.4%); and
- the second lowest average annual household income after Limpopo (R61 000).

Given these statistics, it is hardly surprising that since the 2007 census the province has had the highest levels of net migration from the province, with just over 325 000 people leaving the province.

According to a report compiled by the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development Environmental Affairs and Tourism (ECDEDEAT 2013), the province is the poorest in South Africa. 78% of the households in the province experience food insecurity, compared to a national average of 64%.

The report uses a Fuzzy Index of Poverty that attempts to define poverty holistically by considering twelve indicators of well-being. These include: employment, municipal services

(such as refuse collection, access to water, access to toilet, and access to electricity for lighting, cooking, and heating), type of dwelling, education, income, household size, and access to means of communication such as cell phones. The report uses the 2011 census figures to map poverty in different municipal districts.

*Table 3.1. Fuzzy Proportion of Poor Households (expressed as a percentage)*

District	Employment	Refuse	Water	Dwelling	Toilet	Lighting	Cooking	Heating	Education	Income	Household size	Cell Phone
Cacadu	36%	15%	8%	13%	17%	8%	12%	55%	12%	87%	20%	22%
Amatole	48%	71%	26%	26%	51%	18%	17%	29%	64%	95%	25%	22%
Chris Hani	46%	61%	20%	20%	44%	16%	14%	26%	65%	93%	25%	19%
Ukha-hlamba	44%	61%	22%	22%	45%	20%	14%	25%	65%	93%	23%	20%
O.R. Tambo	48%	77%	29%	29%	51%	22%	23%	31%	67%	95%	34%	19%
Alfred Nzo	48%	80%	20%	30%	53%	42%	28%	37%	68%	96%	33%	20%
NMBM	8%	8%	12%	12%	8%	5%	2%	6%	45%	82%	22%	15%

The Eastern Cape has the highest levels of deprivation in South Africa for 2007 and 2011. In Table 3.1 it can be seen that urban areas, such as the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (NMBM) have lower levels of poverty for many of the indicators compared to the rural areas, but the poverty indicators for education and income remain high. The Alfred Nzo and O.R. Tambo districts in the Transkei have the highest levels of poverty.

### 3.3.1 Nxuba: The rural context

The Nxuba municipality is located in the Chris Hani District. It consists of the towns of

Bedford, Adelaide, Lingeletu and Sizakhele, along with a number of smaller settlements and rural villages. The municipality covers an area of just over 2700km<sup>2</sup>, and has a population of 24264.

The area is characterised by low education and literacy levels. 6.3% of the population over 20 years of age have no education, while 36.9% have only some form of primary school education. Only 16% of the population has completed Grade 12, and only 7.2% have received a tertiary qualification. Agriculture is the dominant economic activity, followed by community and public sector services, along with limited opportunities in the retail and manufacturing sectors. Poverty levels are high with 75.9% of the population earning less than R800 per month and technically falling under the poverty line. This is exacerbated by high levels of unemployment with over 60% of potentially economically active people not being economically active. According to the Nxuba Integrated Development Plan 2012-2017 (NIPD 2012), 32.8% of the population is dependent on social grants for their survival.

Adelaide and Bedford are typical examples of small rural towns in post-apartheid South Africa and are typical of what McKibben, Binns and Nel (2012:391) describe, “The socio-spatial legacies of decades of apartheid policies have scarred the nation and tremendous poverty still exists, even over a decade after apartheid ended. This poverty is particularly evident in South African small towns, many of which are in economic decline for numerous reasons”.

It was difficult to get accurate figures on the number of foreign migrants in the area, perhaps because many of them are in South Africa illegally and want to stay off the radar of the government and police. Certain co-researchers who dislike the foreigners and think that they should be sent home estimated their number at over 500. The two co-researchers who have a positive attitude to the foreigners were convinced that there couldn't be more than 50 or 60. Their estimate was confirmed by that of Zimbabwean migrants that I spoke to.

### **3.3.2 East London: The urban context**

East London is located in the Amatole District of the Eastern Cape and is part of the Buffalo City Municipality. Along with Nelson Mandela Bay, it is one of two major urban areas in the

Eastern Cape. Buffalo City has a population of 755 200, with just over 200 000 people living in East London.

The Buffalo City Municipality Integrated Development Plan 2011-2016 (BCMIDP 2011) provides information on the city. Just under half of the households (45.8%) are headed by women. This reflects the historical and ongoing migration of men from the province as they pursue better prospects of employment in other provinces, particularly the Western Cape and Gauteng. East London has a young population, with 41% of the population is under the age of 19. This is accompanied by a youth unemployment rate of 41.2%, compared to a general unemployment rate of 24.3%. Only 27.1% of people over 20 have completed matric and 13.8% have some form of higher education. The Integrated Development Plan identifies appropriate education and skills levels as a threat to the development of East London.

East London's underdevelopment may arise in part from its location between two of the apartheid Bantustans, the Ciskei and the Transkei. Particularly in the later years of apartheid it became something of an isolated white enclave, cut off from the rest of South Africa by the Bantustans and isolated by geographical distance.

The local economy is made up of banking and financial services (29%), government and community service (28%), manufacturing (17%), trade (13%), transport (8%) and agriculture (1%).

Most of the residents of the city experience poverty; only 36% of households in the area earn more than R1500 a month. Poverty combines with a stagnant local economy and few formal work opportunities to create a sense of hopelessness, particularly among the youth.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Despite significant progress that the post-apartheid South African government has made in addressing the injustices and inequality produced by colonialism and apartheid, the country faces numerous challenges. I am aware that my description of the post-apartheid South African context may seem pessimistic. My intention is not to make a political statement and this is not the only story that could be told; there are variations of the story, and there can be no doubt that for millions of South Africans, their quality of life has improved since 1994.

My intention in offering this bleak narrative of post-apartheid South Africa it is to locate the stories of the co-researchers in this study within a context which, certainly from their perspective, is as grim as my depiction of it suggests.

On their own, any one of systemic poverty, inequality, unemployment, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, crime, violence, and a failing education system would represent a crisis. Cumulatively these forces exert a profoundly destabilising and destructive influence on South African society. It is within this turbulent context that this research seeks to listen to the stories of black South Africans in order to understand their perceptions of foreign migrants and the discourses and meanings that are reflected in prejudice and acts of violence against foreign migrants.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PROBLEM OF FOREIGNERS: IDENTITY, COMPETING INTERESTS AND UNMET EXPECTATIONS

#### 4.1 Introduction

In chapter 3 I described the context in which this study takes place. This is the first of the seven movements for postfoundational practical theology proposed by Müller (2004). The second movement listens to the in-context experiences of co-researchers and describes them. In the third movement, interpretations of these experiences are developed and described in collaboration with the co-researchers. This chapter describes the stories of the co-researchers and the shared understandings that emerged from these stories.

In this chapter I describe the initial interview process used for this research. After that I provide a breakdown of the people interviewed and use third person narratives, based on the interviews, to introduce the co-researchers in this study. Finally I present the themes and perspectives that arose from these interviews. These perspectives and themes will be discussed further in chapter 5, particularly in terms of their relationship with Discourses that function as an interpretive repertoire within these communities. Chapter 6 will then explore them further through an interdisciplinary literature study.

The initial interviews took place before I read theoretical literature on the subject of xenophobic violence in South Africa. I did not want the insights and concerns reflected in literature to be imposed on the interview questions because this might skew the responses given by co-researchers. The literature study that forms the basis for chapter 6 was done after the initial interviews with the co-researchers.

My goal in each interview was to explore the stories and meanings of the co-researchers in the research context as deeply and fully as possible. I began by listening to the stories of co-researchers in unstructured interviews. This was followed by reflections on the interviews on my own and then with each of the co-researchers.

A Narrative approach meant that I avoided labels like xenophobia to describe the ideas or actions of the co-researchers, except where they have used such words themselves. I prefer to describe the experiences of co-researchers using their own words as much as

possible and not to use terminology that totalises them or diminishes them by identifying them with the problem story that they describe (White 1995:43).

## **4.2 The interview process**

### **4.2.1 Selecting co-researchers**

During late 2012 to early 2013 I worked in partnership with a Non-profit Organisation in the Eastern Cape and with local government to provide training and capacity building workshops as part of the Extended Public Works Programme. This work took me into cities, towns and villages across the Eastern Cape. More than that, the workshops created a conversational space where both the aspirations of members of these communities, and the challenges they faced could be discussed. During workshops in East London and in the Nxuba Municipality in the Eastern Cape, the subject of foreigners and their impact on local communities presented itself spontaneously. While this was peripheral to the workshop itself, I asked workshop participants if they would be willing to explore the issue with me. A number of people expressed interest and I met with them and explained my proposed research. These meetings gave rise to two groups of co-researchers, one group in a rural context (Nxuba) and the other in an urban context (East London).

During the course of the research two of the participants from East London moved to other parts of the country and were unable to continue. I did not make use of these interviews in this research because there was not going to be an opportunity to reflect on the research with them. I interviewed two additional people from Duncan Village who were introduced to me by existing co-researchers.

### **4.2.2 Initial interviews**

This study makes use of material from interviews with six people from the Nxuba District and six people from East London. Although all of the co-researchers spoke Xhosa as their home language, they also spoke English. The interviews were conducted in English because all co-researchers were comfortable with this.

In the first interviews, during 2013, I listened to their stories and asked questions about their experiences and their views of foreign migrants living in South Africa. These interviews were recorded and transcripts were made. After these interviews I wrote a brief narrative in

the third person, telling each person's story and summarising their contact with people they considered to be foreigners. I met with them again and edited these narratives with them to make sure that I had represented the conversation accurately. After I had documented the statements that reflected their perceptions and concerns with regard to the foreigners in their communities I met with the co-researchers in 2014 to allow them to read what I had written and make changes so that they felt that I was representing their voices accurately. I spoke to the co-researchers in February and May 2015, to discuss the violence against foreigners that had erupted in preceding months that year, and to reflect on the research process with them.

It is important to retain the anonymity of the co-researchers for ethical reasons. However, I did not want to refer to them simply in terms of their gender, age, and location. I felt that to do this would, in some way, diminish their humanity. For this reason I have changed their names, using fairly common names instead of their actual names to preserve the sense that these are people, and not respondents/objects.

### 4.3 Demographic breakdown of co-researchers

The demographic breakdown of the co-researchers whose interviews I included in the research is as follows:

Group	Age 18-25	Age 25-35	Age 35-45	Age 45-55
Xhosa male (Nxuba)	1	2	1	
Xhosa female (Nxuba)		1	1	
Xhosa male (East London)	1	1	1	
Xhosa female (East London)	1	1		1

## 4.4 The stories of the co-researchers from the Nxuba district

### 4.4.1 Luvuyo's story

#### 4.4.1.1 Background

Luvuyo is thirty two years old. He completed his matric fourteen years ago, but has never been formally employed. At the time of interviewing him, he was working eight days a

month for the Community Works Programme. He supervises a team of thirty people, who do work such as maintaining schools and clinics, cutting grass along the verges of roads, fixing potholes in roads, and generally trying to improve the surroundings in which they live. Luvuyo's father died when he was 18. He lives with his mother, grandmother and two siblings in a two roomed house. He is the only member of the household who is economically active.

In many ways Luvuyo is a typical young, black, South African man, but he is one of only three of the co-researchers (and the only male) who does not resent the presence of foreigners in his community. He sees them as an example to emulate because they are able to start successful businesses and earn a good income.

#### 4.4.1.2 Experience of foreigners

Luvuyo's main points of contact with foreign migrants are at spaza<sup>3</sup> shops and with vendors who sell their goods at taxi ranks and at the side of the road. He mentions that one of the local taverns is owned by a Zimbabwean, and that he shoots pool there and socialises with people from other parts of Africa.

Many of Luvuyo's perceptions of foreigners seem to come from observing them as they arrive and build businesses or make a living as artisans. He admires them for the way they take on the challenge of building a life for themselves in South Africa by starting businesses. Luvuyo said that the only real difference between locals and foreigners is the language they speak. He adds that another difference is that they are not lazy. They are willing to take any small opportunity that presents itself and work hard to make a living. He sees black South Africans as unwilling to take similar opportunities because the short term reward is not big enough. He suggests that black South Africans are very passive and wait for things to be done for them or given to them by government. Black South Africans and foreign migrants have similar goals, but the foreigners actively pursue those goals while South Africans sit back and do nothing. He suggests that it would be better to reflect on one's own laziness rather than blame foreigners for the situation in which one finds oneself.

Luvuyo noted the use of "*amakwerekwere*" as a derogatory label to describe foreigners, and saw it as having similar meaning to the racist term, *kaffir*. While on the surface it

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<sup>3</sup> Informal convenience stores, which are often operated from people's homes.

mimics the sound of foreign language, the meaning behind it suggests a person who is dirty and somehow less than human.

## **4.4.2 Thandi's story**

### *4.4.2.1 Background*

Thandi is 44 years old and a mother of two children aged four and seven. She lives in a single room of a house in Bedford with her mother and two children. She has been unemployed for six years and is dependent on the Child Support Grant she gets from social services and the old age pension her mother receives. Thandi's Christian faith is central to her life. She attends church regularly and feels strongly that she needs to apply her understanding of the Bible to her everyday life.

Thandi tells me that she struggles with her health. She has tuberculosis and is on medication for it, but she does not feel as though she is getting well. She worries about her daughters. Her mother is getting too old to care for them and she is worried about what will happen if she gets sicker. She wants her daughters to have a proper education, but she worries about them falling pregnant while they are still at school. She tells me that all she has is God. If it was not for Jesus, she would lose hope because of the many challenges.

### *4.4.2.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Thandi's most vivid memories of foreigners are from when she lived in Alice. Her neighbours were two men from Kenya who were students at Fort Hare University, and there were people from other African countries living in the block of flats. She says that foreigners are friendly; they always greet people when they pass them in the street. She tells me that her neighbours were kind people who were willing to share their food with her and her children when they had nothing. There are a number of foreigners from other parts of Africa that go to the church she attends.

When I ask Thandi about differences between foreigners and South Africans she laughs, and says that they are tall. She explains that her Kenyan neighbour was a Masai, who was very tall. She adds that Nigerians also seem to be tall, both the men and the women. She suggests that the main difference between foreigners and South Africans is that they are harder working. She does not see them as a threat, but rather believes that South Africans should learn from their example.

She says that while there are some criminal elements, most of the foreigners she has come across are good people. She says that their businesses are successful because they work hard. They open their shops early in the morning, before people go to work, and they close them late. The South African shops owners will only open after nine in the morning. Also, the foreign shop owner will allow people to buy food on credit and pay when they get their salary or social grant. This is why they get more business.

### **4.4.3 Liso's story**

#### *4.4.3.1 Background*

Liso is 19 years old and completed his matric the previous year. His work with the Community Works Programme is the first job he has had and he tells me he wants to learn skills that will help him find a better job. He stays at home with both of his parents and four siblings. His father works as general worker for the local municipality and his mother works at a coffee shop in the town. He is proud of his family and thinks that they have made a good life, even with the limited opportunities that exist in their community.

#### *4.4.3.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Liso does not have any friends from other parts of Africa. His only direct contact with foreign migrants is at a local tavern that is owned by a Zimbabwean and at the spaza shop (a local convenience store). He tells me that he also sees a lot of foreigners selling goods at taxi ranks and alongside the road. They sell things like brooms, mops and feather dusters, or cheap clothing from China. He buys from them when he needs something but he does not attempt to befriend them.

Liso tells me that all of the good jobs are given to foreigners; they take all the opportunities. The only work that locals can get is as casual labourers on farms, but this work is seasonal and usually for about 3 or 4 months a year. He tells me about the local supermarket, where they only employ Zimbabweans. He thinks it is because the Zimbabweans will work for less money than South Africans. He says that he understands that many of them came here due to conflict in their countries, but feels that they should return home to their own countries now.

#### **4.4.4 Buntu's story**

##### *4.4.4.1 Background*

Buntu is thirty one years old and is single, but has two children. He lives with his mother and two younger sisters; his children live with their mothers. Buntu's mother and two younger sisters depend on his income and his mother's pension for survival.

When Buntu completed matric in 1999 he had hopes and dreams for his life. He had worked hard at school and obtained a matric with university exemption. He studied and passed one year of a Bachelor of Commerce at Fort Hare University in Alice before a lack of funds meant he had to end his studies prematurely. He returned to his family home in Lingeletu and performed casual jobs on farms in the area before getting work as a supervisor with the Extended Public Works programme.

He feels that, at 31, the opportunity to make a better life for himself has passed him by. He is resigned to a life of poverty. He tells me that he would have loved to do the kind of training work that I do, teaching people skills and helping them become economically empowered. He laments that he has no skills that would be useful to others.

##### *4.4.4.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Buntu says that he has no hatred for foreigners, but that there are simply too many of them in South Africa. They open up businesses and as a result local people close their businesses. They are willing to work for less money than South Africans so they get jobs more easily. He says that he has a few friends who are foreigners. They are "good guys", but not all foreigners are like them. He says that some sell drugs in the community and he has heard that they are involved in human trafficking.

Buntu finds it frustrating that young women in his community like to go out with foreigners. He says that this is because the foreigners have money. In his view, the foreigners do not really care for the women. They often make them pregnant and then leave them alone with the baby and move somewhere else.

Buntu tells me that white South Africans have never helped black South Africans the way they helped foreigners during the 2008 xenophobia. He thinks that this shows that there is still a big problem on the side of white people in South Africa. They do not care about South African blacks.

Buntu also finds it strange that only foreigners from other parts of Africa are targeted in what he calls xenophobia, while foreigners from Europe and the USA and China are not. He thinks we need to start worrying about the Chinese because they are going to “take over”.

#### **4.4.5 Bongani’s story**

##### *4.4.5.1 Background*

Bongani is 45 years old. He was married and has three children, but his wife left him eight years previously and took their children to live with her parents in a village close to Mthatha. He lives alone in a shack in the back yard of a friend’s house. Bongani tells me that his life is tough. It is difficult to survive on the small income he earns. He thinks that the problem is that the government has forgotten about people like him who live in rural areas. He hopes that the government will provide proper jobs for people like him, and also provide him with a house. He does not think that his children will care for him. He hasn’t spoken to them or heard anything from them since they left him.

##### *4.4.5.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Bongani says that you can’t avoid foreigners. There are too many of them. There are lots of Zimbabweans, and also Pakistani’s, Bangladeshi’s, Somali’s, Malawians, and Ghanaians with salons. They own all of the shops and have started small businesses that repair fridges and television sets and other appliances. He says that you will also find them working as “bush mechanics”, fixing cars and taxis alongside the road. He says that they take all of the jobs and opportunities that should be for South Africans.

He has no friends from other African countries. He says he does not want to be their friend. He thinks they are dirty because they live and sleep in their shops. He claims that they sell drugs and commit crime in the community. He feels that they must go back to where they came from, or there will be trouble again.

#### **4.4.6 Siphokazi’s story**

##### *4.4.6.1 Background*

Siphokazi is 28 years old. She is a single mother with four children. All of them have different fathers and she tells me that none of the fathers lives in the community any more

so she has to support the children on her own. She could not survive without the Child Support Grant she gets for each child. The social grants, along with the income she gets as a supervisor in the Community Works Programme, are used to support her brother, her mother and father, and her grandmother. All of them live in a three roomed house.

She tells me that the men have either left the community, or they are drunks. Women have to be strong to survive because you are on your own. There is no one to help you so you must help yourself.

#### *4.4.6.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Siphokazi says that she gets asked out a lot by men from Zimbabwe and the DRC when she is walking in the street or in a taxi. She says that she would go out with them, but when they find out that she has four children they lose interest in her. She says that she also speaks to men from other African countries when she goes to the tavern on Fridays and Saturdays. She says that they are friendly and buy her drinks if she sits and speaks to them.

Siphokazi believes that there are too many foreigners in South Africa now, and that something must be done because they take opportunities and money from South Africans. Black South Africans live in poverty and the government must provide jobs and proper housing because the grants are not enough. The problem is that foreigners are taking jobs and living in RDP houses (houses built as part of the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme).

## **4.5 The stories of the co-researchers from East London**

### **4.5.1 Unathi's story**

#### *4.5.1.1 Background*

Unathi is 21 and a student at Fort Hare University. She has two sisters and a brother and they all live with her mother and father in Mdantsane. She is the youngest child. Both of her parents work and all of her siblings have graduated from university. She respects her parents for the sacrifices they have made to educate their children.

She is ambitious and wants to make a success of her career. She is hoping to become a Social Worker and work at Correctional Services. She would prefer to work in the private sector, but she does not think they hire many black people. Working for the state will provide her with an opportunity to have the lifestyle she desires. Her dream is to move out of Mdantsane and into the suburbs. She tells me that she would like to live in Sunnyridge (a suburb near East London airport) where she will have a view of the sea.

#### *4.5.1.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Unathi says that there are quite a lot of foreign students at the university. She thinks that this is because we have good universities and people will travel here from far to get a good education. She says that she has no problem with people coming to South Africa to study. She has a number of friends from Zimbabwe, Malawi and the DRC and she likes to party with them.

She believes that the problem occurs when these students stay in South Africa once they have completed their studies. The foreigners who stream over our borders looking for work are also a problem. They start businesses and as a result local business people suffer. She tells me about the area she lives in, where there used to be three spaza shops owned by local Xhosa speaking people. Now those shops are closed and the owners have gone to live in the Transkei. There are now three shops and one is owned by a Zimbabwean woman and two are owned by Somalis. She buys food from these shops because there is nowhere else to go, but she thinks it is wrong that foreigners are making money from the community.

### **4.5.2 Hlonelwa's story**

#### *4.5.2.1 Background*

Hlonelwa is 32. She grew up in Mdantsane, and then spent a couple of years studying communication in Cape Town. She now lives in Mdantsane with her parents. She is currently unemployed, but has self-published a book of her own poetry.

She is a committed Christian and feels that she is defined by her faith and her relationship with God. She wants to make a difference in South Africa and believes that her generation needs to pick up from the generation of those who fought for liberation, and create a better society.

#### *4.5.2.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Hlonelwa had no experience of foreigners until she moved to Cape Town in her early twenties. As she grew up in Mdantsane, she was surprised to discover that people had negative perceptions of Xhosa people, although she was familiar with some negative perceptions of Sotho people held by people in the community in which she was raised. She thinks that apartheid has left us with a legacy of division and suspicion.

In Cape Town she met a number of people from other parts of Africa in the church she attended. She became close friends with a number of these people. When she returned to Mdantsane she found that there were a number of foreigners living there and that the community had changed a lot because of this. She still has friends at church from other African countries, and has quite a lot of contact with foreigners on taxis.

### **4.5.3 Andile's story**

#### *4.5.3.1 Background*

Andile is 28 and unemployed. He lives with his sister in Duncan Village. He tells me that he earns money "parking cars", as an informal car guard in Berea. He says that he gets very little money from people and that some white people swear at him or just drive away without even giving him some small change. Some days he makes fifty or sixty rand, some days it is only enough to buy half a loaf of bread and some loose cigarettes.

Andile's dream is to own a taxi, but he is frustrated because it seems impossible. He has lost confidence in the ability of the government to improve his life. He feels that they have failed people like him. He thinks that South Africa needs an economic revolution. He is a member of the Communist Party because he believes that they are the only party with a solution, which is to take the wealth of the country out of the hands of the minority and share it equally. He is confident that this will happen in his lifetime.

#### *4.5.3.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Andile does not like foreigners. He says that there are too many of them in South Africa. Everywhere you look now you see Chinese shops, Pakistani, shops, Somali shops, everything owned by foreigners. He says that the Somali shopkeepers try to steal from you, you have to watch them carefully.

He claims that foreigners buy RDP houses from people who are struggling financially and then rent out the rooms for a lot of money. The rentals are too high for South Africans, so even more foreigners move in. His mother sold her house in Mdantsane a few years ago to a Nigerian. In six months she had spent that money and then had to go and live with her family in the rural town of Dutywa.

He says that foreigners are involved in crime syndicates that break into people's houses and steal cars. He has heard that they are involved in human trafficking, and that this often involves children. They also sell drugs. He tells me that when you spend your days on the street you learn a lot. You see things. He showed me where there are foreigners selling alcohol illegally from a house, telling me that they also sell drugs.

#### **4.5.4 Busisiwe's story**

##### *4.5.4.1 Background*

Busisiwe is a 47 year old working mother and single parent. She has four daughters and had two sons, but one of them passed away in a taxi accident. She has three grandchildren. Busisiwe works as a cleaner in a hospital and supports her entire family on her meagre salary. She tells me that her life is hard and that she is very tired.

She finds support and encouragement in her church. She says that she knows God sees her, and she hopes that in heaven things will be better.

##### *4.5.4.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Busisiwe says that most of the shops are owned by foreigners, especially Somali's and Pakistanis. There is also a Chinese shop that has opened in her community. She says that the Somali's are good people. When her money is finished they will let her buy on credit and pay at the end of the month. If they did not do this, she and many other would not have food.

Busisiwe tells me that the foreigners make the girls pregnant and then they leave. They all have wives back home. This happened to her youngest daughter, who had a child with a Congolese man. This man is gone now and has left her child to look after the baby. She says that many of the girls like the foreign men because they have money and cars. She shakes her head and tells me that many of them are gangsters and drug dealers. They are destroying the community.

## 4.5.5 Sipho's story

### 4.5.5.1 Background

Sipho is 42. He smoked a cigarette nervously as we spoke and told me that he had never sat down to drink coffee and talk like this with a white person. Sipho lives in Duncan Village and has been unemployed for five years. I met him alongside the road where he was waiting with other men in the hope that they would find casual work for the day. He tells me that he only gets 2 days of work a week this way. The money is bad and he wishes he could get a proper job. He has problems with his health though, and his medication makes him feel bad.

Sipho was married, but his wife passed away. He tells me that she had tuberculosis and that the medication stopped working. He has three daughters who live with him. The eldest is 18 and the youngest is 13. The middle one, who is 16, has just had a baby. They all live together in a one roomed shack behind his parent's house.

He thinks that things must change. People are tired of living in poverty. He spoke with pride about his involvement in AZAPO (the Azanian People's Organisation) during the struggle against apartheid in the 1980's. However, he feels bitter because the ruling party did not recognise people from other organisations. They only give jobs to ANC members. He believes that the revolution in South Africa only went half way. It must be completed so that black people can be free.

### 4.5.5.2 Experiences of foreigners

Sipho says that he sees foreigners selling drugs on the street. They pretend to be selling things made of wire, but if you know them, then you just have to ask and you can get dagga (marijuana), tik (methamphetamine), or anything you want.

He says that not all foreigners are bad. The Somali man who owns the shop near his shack lets him buy food on credit when he has no work. He owes this man over two hundred rand, but he does not need to hide from him. Sipho says that the Somali man keeps telling him to attend the mosque with him so that Allah can give him prosperity. He was a raised a Methodist, but he says that the church is not interested in helping people. He is thinking about going to the mosque and converting to Islam.

Sipho finds it frustrating that white South Africans seem to like black people from Zimbabwe and Malawi, but they hate black South Africans. He thinks it may be because these foreigners will work for slave wages, or because they treat white people like a *baas* (colloquial name for a master).

#### **4.5.6 Odwa's story**

##### *4.5.6.1 Background*

Odwa is 23 years old. He has been unemployed since he completed matric. His parents both work for the municipality in East London, where they have good jobs. His sister works as a supervisor at a local factory. They give him money every month, and are trying to help him find a job. He tells me that he is angry that nearly 20 years after democracy things have not changed; in fact they are worse.

He says that the youth are losing hope; they are angry. He asks where the freedom is that Mandela brought. There is no freedom if you are black and poor. The government has failed to provide jobs, so young people are drawn to crime because at least it pays. Other young people take drugs and spend their time in *shebeens*<sup>4</sup> because there is nothing else.

##### *4.5.6.2 Experiences of foreigners*

Odwa's great love in life is soccer. He tells me that he used to play for a club while he was still in school. He represented Border Rural Districts at an inter-provincial tournament and he had dreams of becoming a professional player. He has stopped playing soccer though. I asked him why he stopped and he told me that the club has been taken over by foreigners, mainly Zimbabweans and some Nigerians and others. There are a few South African's who still play there, but the coach only likes the foreign players and picks them.

Odwa believes that there are too many foreigners in South Africa. South Africa should put its own people first, those who have always lived here. But black South Africans are suffering in poverty and the government is doing nothing. They just let foreigners come over our borders in a free for all. Odwa says that he hates foreigners. He believes that one day, if the government does not do something the people in South Africa are going to take the problem of foreigners into their own hands.

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<sup>4</sup> Drinking establishments, many of which operate without liquor licences.

## 4.6 Reflections on the interviews

As I reflected on the twelve interviews, alone and with each of the co-researchers, it was clear that the views expressed on them varied considerably. There was no univocal position expressed on foreigners. Even where there were similarities, these existed at different points along a continuum rather than representing a single point on it. The process of reflection involved looking for similar vocabularies and ideas that emerged from the interviews. There were themes that emerged consistently in a number of interviews.

These themes could be organised around three dominant issues:

- their identity, and what foreigners signified with regard to their identity;
- perceived conflicts of interest between them and foreigners; and
- unmet expectations, and their frustrations at the lack of change to the circumstances of their lives, despite government promises.

The remainder of this chapter will explore these themes in more detail.

## 4.7 Identity: Foreigners are different

All of the co-researchers indicated that foreigners were different from South Africans in some way. This started with superficial differences such as language and even appearance, but included differences that led to value judgements being made about foreigners. Some of these judgements were perceived as positive, but most were seen to be negative.

### 4.7.1 Positive differences

Three of the co-researchers identified ways in which they believed foreigners were different from South Africans in ways that were positive or admirable.

Thandi told me about her first experience of foreigners:

Thandi: *In two thousand and – when I was in Alice – I was working in Alice, the first time I met these foreigners. There was a student in the University of Fort Hare, he was from Kenya. A long guy, when he comes to my door he will bend like this (demonstrates), so*

*children are so frightened when he comes, but shame he was a nice person. Anyway, I like people; I like to chat with people even if it's a stranger*

*So one day he come to my flat, when he come, yho! The children run away crying yhu! (laughs) You know, he was so frustrated, the second time he came to visit us he bring packet of sweets so the children (laughs), ja, you see this. There was nothing wrong with him.*

*Then there was these two guys who take photos, it was their first time to this country. They didn't own any business, they came with nothing. And you know what I like about that? They started from zero to hero, and they used their power to get something. Not like us, thina, we want something quick quick.*

*Thina, we are rude, we are lazy, everything (pause). iProblem is they look at this side of those people, they don't judge the right side of them.*

*They are friendly to everybody. They've got hearts, those people. I don't see anything serious wrong with them, and they are here for a purpose, they know what they are here for. They are here for business.*

Busisiwe has also had some positive experiences with foreigners:

*Busisiwe: Some of them are good friends because they help us sometimes with anything that you came to them and asked from them, like those that are owning some shops. Some of our mothers they wait for one time to get their pensions so that they can go to them and ask for credit or they turn down then they get their pensions, then they pay it back again. He doesn't need you to pay it back all the money yabon', you can pay them half of the money that you owed them, they don't worry, they give you again if you need also something.*

I asked Luvuyo if there are other differences between South Africans and the foreigners in his community.

*Luvuyo: No, they do not differ, but they differ on one thing: they are not lazy. They just took the opportunity, they didn't (pause) ah (pause) measure this opportunity and say it's too small for me or what, they just take that chance of that opportunity. You see, but us, we don't have the strength to take that opportunity at that time. That's why all the time we are struggling and blame other people who just come in and do their thing.*

I asked him why he thinks we do that?

Luvuyo: *We can't do that same thing. I'm just waking up there on my home and standing there on the gate, I have nothing to do, I'm just waiting for something to come to me. But those people, they didn't wait for those things, they just chased after them. We have the same goals. But us, with those same goals, we just sit with those goals. But they just stand up and go after those goals, you see? That's the thing we don't do that they do. That's why we differ on them; us, here in South Africa, we just sit and wait for those goals. Those goals must come to us, you see? That's why you always blame those guys, you don't want to accept: this thing, it's happening here in you. You see? You want to have someone to blame. On your laziness too, that's why you have the xenophobia.*

A number of the co-researchers described foreigners as kind and helpful. They are polite. They assist each other and do what they can to help fellow migrants settle in an area and survive. But they do not just look after their own; they are willing to help others in the community who need assistance.

All of the co-researchers agree that foreign migrants are goal-oriented, entrepreneurial, and hard working. A minority saw these characteristics as admirable and something that South Africans should emulate. Along with this there was a sense that there are factors that prevent South African blacks from doing this. These factors were described in different ways: laziness, a lack of self-belief, a lack of confidence, and a passive dependence on government.

The majority saw these attributes as a threat to their own economic survival. There was a belief that the foreigners should return to their own countries and use their skills there, rather than “taking opportunities” from South Africans. Some believed that the business success of foreigners had more to do with criminality than it did with their work ethic.

#### **4.7.2 Negative differences**

Luvuyo added that the only real difference between locals and foreigners is the language they speak. This leads us to a discussion of the term “*amakwerekwere*”, a derogatory term that is used for foreigners.

JE: And *amakwerekwere* - what does that actually mean?

Luvuyo: *(Sigh) It's a strong language*

JE: Where does it come from?

Luvuyo: *It's the word they started to use at the time they saw these foreigners starting to come into South Africa.*

JE: You didn't hear it before that?

Luvuyo: *No, there was not that word. It start from their language. We say it sound like "kwerekwerekwere".*

JE: And how would you describe it? What does that word say about someone?

Luvuyo: (long pause) *It's something like (pause) how can I explain this? I don't really have an explanation, because it's not a good word to call someone, you see? Even me, I feel bad if I hear it.*

JE: Let me try to understand with an example. If I hear you talking about me and you call me "*mlungu*" ("white" in Xhosa), *amakwerekwere* is different to *mlungu*?

Luvuyo: *Mlungu is quite neutral, but that one (pause) it's like this word kaffir.*

JE: Really?

Luvuyo: *It says that much (long pause). It's bitter, that one of kwerekwere.*

I nod.

Luvuyo: *Because you're like someone who just (pause) you're calling him like a shit, like someone who just walks there in the forest and just shits and pulls up their shorts and goes, you see? It's something like that. Something smells, something does not smell right. You cannot even sit alongside that person.*

JE: Ok, so that's the kind of feeling behind that word, it's a very negative feeling.

Luvuyo: *You wouldn't use the same cup with him, you see? I cannot even share something with him.*

Some of the co-researchers say that the word *kwerekwere* is used in a humourous, albeit mocking, way. It is simply a jibe that captures the frustration locals have with the massive influx of foreigners and their sense of powerless resignation to this reality. Others admit that

the word is used in a more sinister way; it makes the foreigner less human than South Africans and there are a number of negative generalisations attached to it. Foreigners are dirty; their standards of personal hygiene are not as high as that of South Africans. They are noisy. They keep to themselves and are secretive.

Some of the other co-researchers gave more specific information on the negative perceptions of difference between foreigners and local people.

*Buntu: They are not neat. Even those they are living in the shops, they live inside the shops where they are selling food. In that one place. They are not clean people.*

*Bongani: They don't like to wash, those people. If you are in the taxi with them you will know which one is amakwerekwere because you can smell it.*

#### **4.7.3 White South Africans treat them better than they treat us**

The co-researchers expressed frustration and anger at the way white South Africans had responded to the plight of foreign migrants during the violent attacks of 2008. It was hard to understand this in a context of what they perceived to be blindness to the suffering of black South Africans. The massive mobilisation of resources by white South Africans in 2008, to assist foreign migrants displaced by the violence, only served to amplify the inertia of the same people when it came to willingness to respond to the needs of black South Africans.

One of the co-researchers described a comparison that she believes white people make between black South Africans and black people from other parts of Africa. Generalisations are made about black people from other parts of Africa, which attribute positive characteristics to them that are perceived to be lacking in black South Africans.

*Hlonelwa: And what I've experienced as well is that because of that you have a lot of attitude. And what I've experienced is where I encounter lots of white people who compare black people, I think it comes from Apartheid as well, where they basically say that Zulus are better, or these people are better, and any person who is not a black South African is a better black*

*I have come across that kind of attitude in white communities where there is this perception that maybe Malawians work better, or Zimbabweans are better workers and from what you're telling me this has carried through to black South Africans – that there are white people who carry those ideas and who make that kind of comparison*

*Yes, and it's a very bad attitude and I think it's that attitude that definitely fuels xenophobia. I think the favouritism and the better treatment that are shown by white South Africans shown to non-South African blacks, it is I think something that makes black South Africans resent those, you know, foreigners.*

*Well for me it's like it's a residual of apartheid. It's just another thing that's left from the system of apartheid. It just says we don't accept you. Apartheid was this rejection of black people. Even though black people were used, for the benefit of whites, at the same you were still useful. What I'm saying is, now it's probably a worse form of rejection because not it's "I reject you and I've now found a better person to use".*

*It goes even further than what apartheid or colonisation was about and it just strikes deeper: you're worthless. So I think it's very wounding even though I don't think there's a lot of people that think about it, but I think it's so deeply hurtful to the people. And obviously if it's black – other people from different African countries it's that are seen as better it's obviously also a rejection of ourselves.*

As I reflect on conversations that I have heard among my white peers I am aware that her words reflect something that is real and present in white, suburban discourse in South Africa. I have heard similar things too often. Malawians make better house servants; Zimbabweans are better educated; why can't 'our' blacks be like them?

Within white communities there is evidence of a kind of general Afro-pessimism that regards all of sub-Saharan Africa as the domain of corruption, mismanagement, environmental destruction and failure. However, within this there is a particular disdain that is reserved for 'our' blacks.

#### **4.7.4 Our sense of who we are is damaged**

I was surprised by how many of the co-researchers linked what is described as xenophobia with how black people perceive themselves. This was expressed most clearly by Luvuyo.

*Luvuyo: You see? That's our problem here in South Africa. It's because we don't accept the way we are, or who we are. We hate ourselves, so we hate them.*

JE: That's interesting; why do you think that hatred for self is there?

Luvuyo: *I can't really say, maybe it's our past, maybe it's the situation now, but we don't believe that we can go somewhere and make it. We can't succeed.*

In my interviews with other co-researchers who express hatred for foreigners I discover that their views echo his.

Buntu: *Why do we have no problem with Americans and Chinese and people from Europe? It's because they are not black. We only attack other black people.*

Sipho: *It's not good to be a black man. It means I am poor and I have no opportunities.*

Unathi: *There is something wrong with us. We are broken inside. Our minds have been damaged by oppression, so now we doubt ourselves.*

The answers of co-researchers reflect a deep wound at the heart of the identity of many black South Africans that could be helpful in understanding their relationship with migrants from other parts of Africa.

In my interviews with members of Luvuyo's community who express hatred for the foreigners I discover that their views echo his. Other participants in my research offer similar thoughts and explanations.

Unathi: *To allow certain nations to be in control of the economy does not empower or protect this society. The mind of a poor man is damaged, combined with lack of political education the results are catastrophic.*

Hlonelwa: *It just shows how much we don't prize ourselves because I think our hearts are naturally to welcome people and the fact that we find it so hard to embrace people from the rest of Africa I think it's saying something about us rejecting ourselves.*

Most of the co-researchers described a sense of identity that included self-doubt at the very least, but that seemed to be a much stronger sense of rejection and even self-hatred. To be black and South African is a curse.

Luvuyo's words, and those of other co-researchers, suggest that there is a profound crisis of identity behind the denigration of foreign migrants by local South Africans, and the attacks on them. It must be significant that, for Luvuyo, the word "*kwerekwere*" carries the same weight and depth of disparagement that the word "*kaffir*" carries. The foreigner is

seen as foul, almost sub-human, and not worthy of a place in society. This label is reserved for black foreigners. The South African Migration Project's 2006 study of xenophobia in South Africa showed that foreigners from Europe and the United States are viewed in a positive manner by the majority of South Africans and are unlikely to experience xenophobic attitudes or violence (Crush (ed) 2008).

#### **4.8 Competing interests: Foreigners are a threat**

The major objections to the presence in South Africa of migrants from other parts of Africa are related to crime and conflict involving economic competition for jobs and opportunities, and social competition for women and status.

*Andile: They are a threat to all of us, these foreigners. They bring crime, they bring drugs. These people are undermining our economy.*

##### **4.8.1 Foreigners commit crime**

Foreigners are believed to be behind organised criminal activities such as drug dealing, prostitution, human trafficking. They are also believed to be behind internet scams that defraud unsuspecting people. There is a sense that these things would not be happening if foreigners were not living in our communities.

*Bongani: The issue of some of them are selling drugs, some of them marry young children. I have hear of cases where these guys takes children out of school and make them pregnant, you see, and marry them and all that stuff.*

*Liso: Drug trafficking also. And you know these, I am going to mention the origin of their country, the Nigerians, they like to feed people drugs, and make those sex tapes and distribute it via the sites and the internet stuff, you see. Another thing, they fake our money. They fake it. We try by all means to make those new ones, bigger ones, but after a month they've got fakes.*

*Buntu: Some of them now, they have computers and some of the laptops, they call you on your cell number and tell you you have won something, just come and deposit some money on this account number then they go and draw that money then you lose your money.*

*Odwa: They bring drugs. They have freedom they do what they want when they want. Xenophobia is not a good thing but how does someone come and take over like that? These guys are connected with the drug lords who are connected with entrepreneurs. They collecting the money in every possible way and they are destroying South Africa in the process*

*Unathi: These foreigners are the ones who are involved in human trafficking, especially the Nigerians. They are taking our women to their countries, and then they bring their women to mzansi<sup>5</sup>. They are promising them jobs, but there is no job. They are given drugs and then made to work as prostitutes.*

#### **4.8.2 Foreigners are stealing our jobs and economic opportunities**

It is clear from what the co-researchers tell me that they perceive a high level of competition from foreign migrants for jobs and economic opportunities. There is a belief that foreigners are willing to work for less than South Africans. The only reason they are given work, rather than a South African, is because they will work for less than the minimum wage.

*Liso: These amakwerekwere are killing us. They are stealing our jobs and shutting down our shops.*

*Andile: These foreigners are here to kill us slowly, you know they buy expired goods and change the dates and sell them cheap. Then we say they know business but they are killing us.*

*Sipho: Me, as a resident of this city, I will say “No I won’t work for R50” because I’ve got family to feed and you must be paid a human living wage. Yes, I must be paid. R200 is right for me, but then that man he will work for the R50 and I get no work.*

*Buntu: Those guys, they work for peanuts. They will take a job for little money. Then you see we can’t get jobs because these foreigners have them. So if you have a business you employ foreigners because you can exploit them in this way. This thing is killing us.*

The language used by Buntu and Andile is significant; their perception is that foreigners are killing them. Opportunities to work are literally a life and death issue, where the absence of work means no money to buy food.

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<sup>5</sup> A colloquial term for South Africa derived from the Nguni term for “south”.

The ability of foreign migrants to start and run successful small businesses like shops and hair salon is also seen as a threat to the economic survival of locals.

*Bongani: And you know these local business people from the location, I also have a problem with them because in one street there will be one South African shop but he will be surrounded by five of them, in each and every corner there is a shop. It forces our local people to close shop. You see, it's another issue, they take bread away from us, you see?*

There is disagreement among the co-researchers about whether foreign shops are actually driving local shops out of business. Some of the co-researchers insist that there were no local shops and that the opportunity to open shops brought foreigners into the community. All of the co-researchers agreed that, where they existed, shops owned by South Africans were a lot more expensive than the foreign owned shops. Also, the local shops tended to open late, after people had left for work and close before people returned from work.

#### **4.8.3 They are stealing our women**

The co-researchers all agree that foreign men are dating local women, and often marrying them. Some insist that these are marriages of convenience and a ploy to get permanent residence status or citizenship. Two of the co-researchers disagree and say that, from their observations, there are healthy relationships and strong marriages between foreigners and locals.

The younger men feel that foreigners have an unfair advantage over them because they have money, and often cars. This makes them more attractive to local women. This reality is confirmed by the younger women among the co-researchers.

*Liso: They are coming here and stealing our women. They make them pregnant and then they just go home and do not even pay a cent. If you have got money and a car it is easy to find a woman. These guys they take our opportunities and then we have no money, yabon', and then they go further to take the woman.*

#### **4.8.4 We are being marginalised and pushed aside**

A persistent theme that emerges as I listen to the co-researchers is that of displacement. Their experience is described as one of continually being pushed aside, being marginalised. The arrival of large numbers of foreign migrants over the past ten years has

created an experience of displacement that echoes the displacement of colonialism and apartheid.

Hlonelwa: *All of a sudden there are all these people coming into your space, and you're like, "hang on, can I have my space?"*

Buntu: *I don't have a problem with foreigners but in South Africa, but they are occupying lot of space and land and that to me is overcrowding and over population, while we struggle to survive on our own land. We are being marginalised in our own country.*

Andile: *We have already lost so much; now we are losing even more because of these foreigners.*

Bongani: *We have no jobs, we have no land, all we have is this poverty*

Hlonelwa: *The displacing of people, even if it's now their businesses, it kind of feeds into the pain of apartheid. It's become a monster. We've been pushed from our community, and we're always losing out. We're the losers. We just keep losing. Your land, you've lost respect, all of that, and it just keeps happening, even in freedom.*

When viewed this way, the presence of foreign migrants is seen as more than just a source of conflict. It is a source of loss. It is a wound that is being inflicted on the unhealed scar tissue of similar, but deeper wounds.

Hlonelwa: *You're very aware that someone has been pushed aside and displaced, which is really the same pain that comes from apartheid and colonialism. You've been pushed out of your space and your life has been taken out of your hands. The displacing of people, even if it's now their businesses, it kind of feeds into the pain of apartheid. It's become a monster. We've been pushed from our community, and we're always losing out. We're the losers. We just keep losing. Your land, you've lost respect, all of that, and it just keeps happening, even in freedom.*

## **4.9 Unmet expectations**

### **4.9.1 A lot has changed since 1994, but not the things we hoped would change**

Statements made by the co-researchers suggest that it isn't only these conflicts that make

the presence of foreign migrants difficult. Their presence reflects massive changes that have taken place in their communities. These changes were not expected and the perception is that they have a negative impact on the lives of black South Africans. These unexpected changes also seem to highlight the reality that many expected and hoped for changes have not taken place since 1994. The “Better Life for All” promised in ANC election campaigns has not materialised. They still live in grinding poverty and experience its impact in every part of their communities and lives. The progress made by the government in providing housing and services, and the provision of social grants, appears relatively insignificant when compared with overwhelming levels of poverty and unemployment. They remained trapped in a social underclass from which prospects of escape seem remote.

What has changed, particularly in the past ten years, is the presence of large numbers of migrants from other parts of Africa who are achieving the upward mobility that eludes most poor South Africans. The industry of these foreigners tends to make them highly visible in the poor communities where they live and trade. Instead of being beacons of hope they have become a symbol of further displacement and hopelessness.

*Hlonelwa: I think, also, the change is overwhelming. It's like nobody transitions us from the past where we had all of this to ourselves and so I think just this change has been very shocking. It hasn't been gradual. It hasn't been gradual in terms of "in my generation it was like this" and now it's become like that. It's been within...I mean I'm still under 35 but I've experienced all this: apartheid, the change from apartheid to the new South Africa, and then I'm still shocked when I come back to Mdantsane and see how much the community has changed and there are these different people that we have to get used to (pause). Really, I can't explain it to you but it's a shock to our system.*

*Busisiwe: This community it has changed so much. There were some shops there (points), but you see they are closed. A family was living in that house, now it is a Somali shop. People have gone back to the rural area because here there are too many foreigners. When I was a child we did not even know this thing of a foreigner. Even in 1994 it was the same. Now, everywhere there are foreigners on every street corner. They are too many.*

*Andile: The situation is out of control (pause) there are just so many of them.*

While South Africans were still adjusting to the transition from apartheid to democracy “outsiders” have arrived in large numbers and changed the social and economic landscape of communities. There is a sense that this unexpected change is at least partly to blame for the reality that, after twenty years of democracy, people in these communities are still trapped in poverty.

*Unathi: I don't think South Africans hate foreigners, but the current situation is getting out of hand. Too many foreigners are flocking into the country and it has become unsustainable. This will lead to catastrophic consequences as SA is facing high unemployment rates. Foreigners must take charge and fix they own countries, SA cannot accommodate everyone as we have limited resources as well and it's a reality that we must accept unless we want SA to be a failed state. As Africans it's high time we fight for what belongs to us.*

*Odwa: This is our country and we must put our people first. They do not belong here. They must go.*

#### **4.9.2 We have become dependent on the government**

Many of the co-researchers spoke of a type of passivity that was described in different ways. Some spoke of laziness, others of a dependence on government in which they had ceased to be active participants in shaping their futures, except by voting.

A highly developed sense of helplessness, of incapacity, is reflected in the stories of co-researchers, particularly among the men I spoke to. Some of them blame the apartheid past, and the poor education they received. Some blame the current government, and say that the combination of government grants and government promises of houses and jobs for everyone has led to a situation where people sit and expect these things to just come to them.

*Thandi: They say they are taking our buildings they are taking our houses and make shops. My question is where were you when these foreigners come here? Because if you can go to that location over there, there is a row of shops there (indicates with her hand). Empty! They were empty. And I can tell you John, if those foreigners can close those shops here in the location there will be no shop to buy anything. We are too lazy. You see when you come, you wake up early in the morning, you want a half a loaf of bread. At 7 o'clock those people are open already. You can go there and get a bread. At that time when we were running those shops, thina, they are opening at 9 o'clock, you see?*

Luvuyo: *They just say the foreigners they come and take our shops, and they come here and take our work. They say, but I don't see like that because us, us people living here in South Africa, we're too lazy to do things - we don't want to wake up until there is someone who wakes up first, then we just put the blame on those people because of our laziness.*

Hlonelwa: *I think you start to feel insecure. And insecure because they seem like they don't have much, and they seem like (pause) and I think because the other people (foreigners) are more entrepreneurial they are (pause) umm I think people are also intimidated by that and they feel like they are inadequate.*

Buntu: *I think our problem is we want the government to do everything. So we sit and we wait. Or maybe have another child to get that grant.*

Buntu: *Ja, we are too dependent on grants. They make us too lazy.*

Busisiwe: *We are waiting for the government to give us houses. We are still waiting for the government to provide jobs. Even these grants, they are not enough, the government must increase them because we are hungry.*

Bongani: *Our government must look after us. We only see them when there is election and they want you to vote. Then for four years you can't find that guy. He is employed in government now but he will forget about you. The problem is our government. They have not given us houses or jobs as they have promised. All we know is that the corrupt and they are enriching themselves. But they do not care about our problems here. They do not even see us.*

The possibilities for a better life lie mainly in the hands of government. The solution to poverty is increased service delivery from the state. The sense that they are helpless to change their own lives is a constant theme, along with a deep resentment of the foreign migrants in their communities who have arrived and in the space of a few years have started businesses, sometimes bought houses and cars, and have the extra cash that is attractive to the young women in their community.

Bongani's words suggest a further dimension, that of not being visible. The co-researchers believe that their situation is not noticed, their voices are not heard. They only hear from political leaders at election times.

### 4.9.3 We are not yet free

There is a ubiquitous theme of freedom in my conversations with co-researchers. They present an understanding of freedom that moves beyond the equality and political freedom attained in 1994. The absence of freedom encompasses everything that is negative about their life situations.

Sipho: *After twenty years we are still not free. How can I be free when all I have is poverty?*

Bongani: *How does it help me to vote? I vote but I am still poor. I vote but I have no food on the table. This vote is not freedom.*

Buntu: *This freedom (pause) what does it mean I am free if I have no house, no money to buy bread, no money for airtime. I am not free, I am still poor.*

Unathi: *Without economic freedom black South Africans are not free. Where are the houses? Where are the jobs?*

Andile: *We must fight for our freedom. You see, I am not free like you because I have nothing. And these foreigners, they are stealing the economic opportunities, which means we are still poor. If we do not have economic freedom we are not free.*

Here, freedom is constructed in terms of access to housing, services, and a certain level of consumption. It was hoped that the transition to democracy in 1994 would result in changes to their economic circumstances, that economic freedom was the corollary of political freedom. The reality that there has been little change in their economic circumstances results in frustration, and even disillusionment.

It was interesting that such a notion of freedom would be a constant theme in conversations about the presence of foreigners. It suggested that frustration at this absence of freedom was amplified by the presence of foreign migrants, who might experience better economic circumstances because of their skills or entrepreneurial abilities. These outsiders seem to be receiving the benefits of a freedom that lies beyond the reach of local residents.

### 4.9.4 Something needs to be done about this

Most of the co-researchers describe conversations and attitudes within their communities that lead them to expect outbreaks of violence against foreigners that are similar to the

2008 violence - or possible even worse. They talk roughly about a time-frame of eighteen months to two years before they expect things to reach a tipping point where frustrations will spill over into xenophobic violence.

*Busisiwe: Our community is flooded with Zimbabweans and Nigerians and Congolese. This is our country. They must go or there will be problems.*

*Odwa: We are sick and tired of this news that South Africans were in their countries during apartheid because they were not everywhere, they were not on every street in every town and they were not selling nyaope<sup>6</sup>. They must all go back and start afresh in their countries.*

*Buntu: If the government doesn't do something, I think things can explode again. It will be like 2008 but I think maybe it will be worse than that.*

*Bongani: We cannot live like this. People are getting angry. People they are sick and tired of waiting for things to improve. If things do not get better we must take this in our own hands to take back our country.*

I ask him what he means by this and he tells me that there will be a revolution, an uprising. He believes that poor, black people in South Africa are reaching the end of their patience. If the government does not act to improve their lives, they will act. I ask him how much longer he thinks people will be patient. He replies that it will be two years or maybe a bit longer.

There is an apparent conflation of the perceived threats posed by foreigners and the lack of change in their community due to government's lack of service delivery. They are spoken about by co-researchers in a manner that suggests the former is the source of the latter and that the ejection of foreigners will somehow reverse the trend of declining service delivery and transform the lives of poor South Africans.

## **4.10 Reflections on the interviews**

### **4.10.1 Reflecting together**

As we reflected on the content of the interviews, we also reflected together on the experience of them sharing and me listening to their experiences and stories about their

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<sup>6</sup> A dangerous street drug made of marijuana, heroin, rat poison, anti-retroviral drugs, and bicarbonate of soda.

lives and about foreigners living among them. The process of listening deeply to a person's story was a moving experience for me. I experienced this with all of the co-researchers. They told me that being listened to in an attentive and non-judgemental way, especially by a white person, was a positive experience for them. Listening deeply seemed to be an act of grace that affirmed the story teller's dignity and humanity. It was also an act of healing that in some way restored and even added to my humanity.

#### **4.10.2 Personal reflection: My white privilege and possible status as a “foreigner”**

During the initial interviews there was no mention of the fact that I was a white male who experienced life very differently to the co-researchers. There was no mention of the privilege I have experienced, and continue to experience, by virtue of the colour of my skin. There was no reciprocal curiosity about my experience of foreigners and my thoughts about them, even though the conversational nature of the interviews might have allowed this.

This seemed significant because it suggested that my privileged place in society was taken for granted by the co-researchers. It was a given, and as such it was not subjected to the kind of scrutiny that the role of black migrants in perpetuating poverty received. This seemed to me to be a reflection of the power dynamics between black people and white people that exist in South Africa, and the reality that as much as I tried to share power, the distribution of power between myself and the co-researchers was skewed in my favour by my privilege as well as my role in the research process.

My own status as a foreigner who has displaced black South Africans was raised by some of the co-researchers in the final round of reflection with them that took place at the end of 2014. Their willingness to engage with me on this issue may reflect shifts in discourses about citizenship and foreigners that have occurred during the period of my research.

#### **4.10.3 Concluding reflection**

The conversations with co-researchers did not seem to yield information that was not fairly typical of discourses on foreigners that have been recorded in the media. This suggested two things to me:

1. That there were dominant Discourses on foreigners in communities such as the ones in which the co-researchers in this study lived, and these served as interpretive repertoires for them in their attempts to make sense of their lives.

2. That these Discourses needed to be explored in order to understand how meaning was being constructed with regard to the presence of foreigners in South Africa, and particularly meaning that resulted in the production of violence against foreigners.

In the following chapter I will describe these discourses, and show how they illuminate the issues raised by co-researchers. I will then reflect on them and how they combine to construct meaning in the research context.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE STORIES THAT CONSTRUCT XENOPHOBIA

#### 5.1 Introduction

The stories told by the co-researchers in this study, and recorded in the previous chapter, are also told by many other South Africans to explain their antipathy towards foreign migrants, and this has been described by a number of researchers (Harris 2002; Crush 2008; Neocosmos 2008; Misago et al 2009; Landau (ed) 2012; Banda & Mawadza 2015). This reflects similarities of context and life experience. It also reflects their location in the same stream of social discourse.

From a social constructionist perspective, as people interact and use language they produce, maintain, and change meaning, thereby constituting our social world. Language does not reflect psychological or social reality; it constructs it (Breakwell, Hammond & Fife-Schaw 2000). The various ways that meaning is expressed in society is reflected in Discourses, which describe aspects of the world in certain ways (Parker 1997:285).

Following Alvesson and Kärreman (2000), it is helpful to distinguish between two senses in which the notion of discourse is used. The term “discourse” (little “d”) is used to describe talk and text in ordinary social practice. The term “Discourse” (big “D”) is used to refer to broader and enduring systems of ideas within a historically situated context. Discourses simultaneously construct our world and claim to be the truth about this constructed world. They constitute power relations in society by privileging certain bodies of knowledge and marginalising others (Foucault 1984:74).

These Discourses are socially negotiated systems of thought and ways of thinking about things that function as linguistic resources for people when they communicate (Foucault 1977). Potter, Wetherell, Gill and Edwards (1990) argue that Discourse functions as an interpretative repertoire, a linguistic resource of specific terminology, metaphors, habitual forms of argument, and narratives (Potter & Wetherell 1987; Wetherell 1998).

Discourse is constructed from pre-existing linguistic resources such as words, categories, idioms and repertoires. These resources are used in different ways, resulting in a variety of

accounts of the world (Wiggins & Potter 2008). By drawing on linguistic resources and using language in various ways, people construct their own versions of the world.

Whether it is formal academic writing or in everyday communication, discourse constitutes speech acts that perform certain functions, such as legitimising or challenging, supporting or treating with irony, endorsing or subverting what is being described (Parker 1997). Discourses are designed to accomplish something, whether it is bolstering an argument, presenting something as a fact, or managing interests (Sheriff & Wetherell 2009).

This chapter will explore some of the Discourses that provide resources for and are reflected in the stories of the co-researchers in this study. These are Discourses on identity, displacement, belonging, entitlement, leadership discourses, discourses of blame, and faith discourses. My proposal that these discourses are reflected in the interviews with co-researchers is based on a thorough analysis of transcripts of the interviews. I looked for themes that were common to all of the interviews, and for common vocabularies. I explored the understandings behind these vocabularies in order to ascertain whether meanings were shared. After I had compiled a list of narratives from the interview material I met with the co-researchers and discussed these broader South African stories with them. They agreed that these narratives were central to the concerns they had expressed in our interviews.

Not all of the features of every Discourse were explicitly reflected in the stories of all the co-researchers, but in order to provide a thicker description of the Discourses I have drawn on descriptions of them in the literature on violence against foreigners in South Africa. I will then turn to *ubuntu* discourse. Even though co-researchers were silent on *ubuntu* in relation to foreigners, this study was motivated to a certain extent by curiosity about the role that *ubuntu*, which is said to be such a powerful African social value, could play in addressing violence against foreigners in South Africa. As noted previously, the violence against foreigners is often said to reflect the absence of *ubuntu*, and the notion of *ubuntu* is an ubiquitous feature of anti-xenophobic discourse.

It is important to note that from a social constructionist perspective, these Discourses constitute the social reality of the co-researchers. Their identities are the product of subject positions they take up within these Discourses. This social construction of identity will be briefly described. I will then describe the Discourses reflected in the interviews with co-researchers, and thicken that description by referring to descriptions of these Discourses in

other literature. I will engage in critical reflection on these Discourses as attempts to explain violence against foreigners in South Africa.

The Discourses explored here are also not mutually exclusive. In fact, I will argue more thoroughly later, it is the absence of certain alternative stories and the points of intersection between the various stories that hold the greatest promise for understanding the violence against foreigners.

## **5.2 Discourses and identity**

Within a social constructionist perspective, the self is not some kind of essence or a true, authentic nature that is integrated and bounded (Gergen 1991:7; White 2001:6). Rather, the self is a product of Discourse, enmeshed in a web of social exchanges characterised by power relationships (Caputo 1997:113-114; Freedman & Combs 1996:34; Madigan 1996:50).

Identity is preceded by language and by the social. The only access we have to ourselves and the world is through language. Identity is constructed through grammars, logics and metaphors that exist in language (Burr 1995; Harré 1987), and these are the products of history and culture (White 2001:6). Furthermore, one's identity is embedded in social relationships (Gergen 2002:17), and these social relationships precede the self because without relationships there is no language that can be harnessed to describe the self (Gergen 1991:157). Epistemologically, community precedes the construction of individual identity (Gergen 1987:61-62). Within communities, language is the tool used by people as they create meaning and knowledge together.

The consequence of this social and linguistic positioning of the self is that we are surrounded by and immersed in Discourses. Social constructionism's focus on the way language is used in Discourses is central to its understanding of identity and how identity is constructed. We live immersed within multiple Discourses that construct our identities and our reality through their descriptions of the world. Our experience of ourselves, the world around us, our place in the world, and the rules according to which we live are constructed by means of categories and concepts made available to us in Discourses (Davies 2000:88). These systems of signification generate both our identity as well as the meanings we attach to our lives and their circumstances.

Subjectivity is constituted by taking up a certain position within these Discourses (Davies 1991:43). To have an identity is to take up a position in one or more Discourses (e.g. white, male, and middle class are all stories about a certain way of being in society – with certain privileges and rules - before they are descriptors for the self). Our identities are socially constructed as we take up subject positions within Discourses. The self is therefore a social and literary product rather than a metaphysical essence.

The subjectivity that arises from this discursive positioning provides a sense of identity and shapes the narratives we use to think and talk about ourselves (Graham 1996:30). Discourses provide us with the stories that we use to give meaning to our lives (Davies 2000:89). The discourses in which we are positioned use certain metaphors and images; they bring with them certain perceptions and interpretations of the world. These shape the way a person understands their identity, their lives, and the possibilities for life that are open to them. Everything a person says or does arises from the discursive positions that they occupy. By taking up different subject positions in alternative Discourses a person can change their story and their sense of identity. The multiple subject positions we take up are the product of the power relations between discourses. As we live immersed in a competitive discursive field we either claim or resist the various identities offered to us by prevailing Discourses.

The stories that constitute one's identity as 'my story' do not arise or exist in isolation. They are always embedded in the stories of the communities and contexts in which one lives (Grenz 1995:98). The socially constructed stories within a community shape identity as they are continually told and retold. Our narratives of identity are negotiated and contested as they are constructed in society (Freeman 2001:287; Gergen 2002:16).

Since identity emerges in the exchange of language between people, and language is always provisional and contested, identity is "fragmented, shifting and temporary" (Burr 1995:40); it remains fluid and open to alternative constructions as meanings shift and language changes. This understanding of identity means it is always open to change through the destabilising or deconstruction of prevailing Discourses.

The Discourses that are described in this chapter play a role in constructing both the identities and the social realities of the co-researchers in this study. They are constitutive of their world. This is not to say that all of these Discourses function in the same way for all

co-researchers, some of them were absent in conversations with certain co-researchers, and some of them were present in all conversations.

### **5.3 Stories about identity**

#### **5.3.1 Afrophobia or Negrophobia**

Co-researchers spoke about self-hatred, self-doubt and a lack of belief in their worth as black people. This narrative of self-hatred was particularly evident in statements made by Luvuyo. Seedat, Bawa and Ratele (2010) evaluate the various reasons offered for the violence and conclude that,

While such explanations offer a degree of systemic understanding, they do not explain sufficiently why the 'Wretched of the Earth', the poor, downtrodden and oppressed as Frantz Fanon called the unenfranchised in French-occupied colonial Algeria, kill their own (Seedat et al 2010:19).

The issue of identity has been neglected or marginalised in many studies of xenophobia in South Africa. Exceptions are Mngxitama (2008a), Dineo Gqola (2008), Tafira (2011) and Matsinhe (2011), who problematise the violence against foreigners as a product of historically and structurally produced identities that are the result of the racism of apartheid. This presents itself as Afrophobia, from a loathing of blackness that is the result of the oppression of colonialism and apartheid. It is an externalisation of self-contempt that projects the negative feelings one has about oneself onto others.

A unique feature of South Africa, compared to other African countries, is the sustained development and detailed implementation of an ideology of white supremacy (Mamdani 1996). Asymmetric power dynamics produce identification with established groups within the weaker groups. This leads to members of weaker groups using the social standards of the stronger groups to measure their personal and collective self-worth, which in turn results in the development of self-contempt, which often manifests in self-destructive behaviour, including contempt and violence towards people who resemble them (Elias 1994). Matsinhe argues that:

The almost exclusive loathing of African foreign nationals in South Africa suggests that, to a lesser or greater extent, South Africans—their social relations, their interdependencies, their attitudes towards life, their habitus, their personality structure, their collective conscious and unconscious, and their

emotions—bear the imprints of colonial/apartheid relations (Matsinhe 2011:300).

Zondi (2008:33) reflects on post-apartheid South Africa and argues that, South Africa abandoned social dialogue for service delivery. A focus on meeting the basic needs of people led to a neglect of the secondary needs of identity and belonging. “In pursuit of action-oriented government efficiency, targets and action plans on service delivery took precedent over the political process of patiently building an inclusive national personality and consensus”. Zondi (2008:34) concludes that public violence that erupts, including violence against foreigners, arises from issues of identity rather than from xenophobia.

Mngxitama (2008b:28), a journalist at City Press at the time, pointed in the same direction, arguing that the reason for the violence was a failure to “decolonise our minds” as much as it was a failure to address socio-economic realities.

In the South African context, this shaping of identity in relation to an allegedly superior or inferior cultural ‘Other’ is still characteristic of public discourse. Neocosmos (2008:591) notes that the post-apartheid state has maintained the practice of classifying people according to apartheid racial categories. He argues that this creates a problem as it makes it natural to view people through racial or national lenses. South Africa is a country where race, ethnicity, or ‘otherness’ remains a dominant aspect of identity.

Clarke refers to the work of Fanon and Zizek and argues that the crux of a cultural identity is:

The notion of identity as shaped not just in relation to some other, but *to the Other*, to another culture. The notion of cultural identity becomes much stronger and firmer when we define our ‘selves’ in relation to a cultural Other. We start then to see ideas around ‘ways of life’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, and this is at the heart of racism, hatred and exclusion (Clarke 2008:511).

Clarke (2008) explores Foucault’s proposal that the self is created in relation to expert discourses that define what is normal. He writes (2008:515), “Foucault shows us how expert discourses develop systems of knowledge that sustain power relations and domination in society”. While Foucault’s work deals with the construction of identity in relation to definitions of mental health and pathology, it is relevant for our understanding of cultural identity. In South Africa, race still defines who we are.

Mothoagae notes Steve Biko's observation on the psychological impact of segregation and apartheid on the African person who was "reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the inevitable position" (Biko 2002:78, cited by Mothoagae 2011:9).

This fracturing of identity is evident in statements made in the media and on social media, statements that echo Luvuyo's words about self-hatred. Sihle Hlophe, a young, black South African film maker, posted a video on YouTube lamenting the 2008 xenophobia. She says,

Why are white foreigners not being attacked? Why is it only the blacks and from other parts of Africa? ...This self-hatred has reached like insurmountable degrees of...oooph! It's terrible! We South Africans hate ourselves for being black, and when we see our brothers and sisters we see ourselves in them and we hate them as well. So until we start loving ourselves for being black and for being African (pauses and shakes her head) we'll always have xenophobia (Hlope 2008).

## 5.4 Stories of displacement

Co-researchers consistently expressed a sense of having been pushed aside and marginalised. Their place in the world had been stolen by colonialism and apartheid, and was now under threat from foreign migrants.

This section will briefly explore some of the historical background to their current experience before attempting to describe the broader discourses of displacement and marginalisation that shape their social reality.

### 5.4.1 The loss of the land

Co-researchers spoke of their experience of loss and displacement. The loss of their land, coupled with a lack of progress in land reform subsequent to 1994, is a pervasive source of discontent in the communities where I conducted this research. The land issue is about what land represents as well as about the land itself. Andrews (2007:203) points out that, "Land is linked to a life of dignity and to culture: 'Land is a source of life and wellbeing (*impilo*). It supports crops that feed the family, livestock that provide milk, meat and ancestral sacrifice...there is no home without land' (AFRA News 2004:3)".

The South African state, formed in 1910, introduced the Natives Land Act in 1913 to give legislative effect to the dispossession of land. It placed 90% of land in the hands of white

people and confined indigenous people to the marginal 10%. This was increased to an area totalling 13% of the land under the Natives Trust and Land Act of 1936. The areas demarcated by this act later became the “homelands” under the apartheid government (Beinart 2001).

The creation of the homelands involved the forced removal of around three and a half million people who were displaced and then relocated in a homeland area (Platzky & Walker 1985). Dispossession had a massive impact on African peasants. Not only did they have their land taken, many of them had to move to cities to find employment in mines and factories (Callinicos 1987). Ntsebeza and Hall (2007:3) point out that black agriculture thrived in South Africa up to the late nineteenth century, but that the discovery of minerals created a demand for cheap labour and colonial strategy shifted from promoting agriculture to forcing Africans to become wage labourers. This was reflected in the Glen Grey Act, passed by Cecil John Rhodes’ parliament in 1894. This act made it illegal for Africans to buy and own land that was not on the 7% of land allocated to them. It also abolished labour tenancies and the sharecropping system, resulting in the destruction of peasant farming in South Africa (Fraser 2007).

The reversal of these massive injustices was a central focus of the Freedom Charter. It stated that the land was to be shared among those who worked it, racial restrictions on land ownership would end, and that a re-division of land would bring an end to famine and hunger.

At the time of South Africa’s transition to democracy, approximately 45,000 white farmers owned 82.2 million hectares or 67% of South Africa’s land area in 1996 (Walker 2006:145). In order to address this imbalance the South African government embarked on an ambitious land reform project in 1994. The government set a target of redistributing 30% of commercial farming land over the first five years of its rule. This goal was contained in the ANC election manifesto, and in the government’s Reconstruction and Development Programme. However, five years later only 1% of agricultural land had actually been transferred back to people who had been disposed. After a further five years this figure had only risen to just over 3% (Ntsebeza & Hall 2007).

Atuahene (2011) researched the economic impact of compensation made through the land claims process in post-apartheid South Africa. Atuahene’s study showed that only 30% of people who received compensation awards experienced significant economic benefit, and

these were people who received awards that were relatively large (a mean award of R127 274). Only 16% of people who received awards of less than R20 000 experienced significant economic benefit. Those that received smaller awards tended to spend the awards on their needs for everyday living, with the result that they brought no real long term change to the economic circumstances of the recipients.

Gibson (2010:40) conducted a significant survey of public opinion on the land issue in South Africa and found that 85% of black respondents believed that “most land in South Africa was taken unfairly by white settlers, and they therefore have no right to the land today”. He also found that over 60 % of black people felt that that land should be returned to black people, irrespective of the consequences for the present owners or for political stability in the country.

There is currently a renewed focus on the land issue in South African public discourse, not least because of the way that Julius Malema and his political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), have highlighted the need for economic reform and redistribution of land and other resources. The EFF were formed after Julius Malema was expelled from the ANC. The election manifesto of the EFF (EFF 2014) begins with the statement that “20 years later, black people are still not free!” because of poverty, landlessness, their subjection to slave labour, and a lack of access to basic services. The manifesto calls for expropriation and redistribution of land without compensation, and the nationalisation of banks, mines and key sectors of the economy without compensation. It argues that it’s “Marxist-Leninist Fanonian” policies will generate massive development of the economy and a free, just society.

#### **5.4.2 Ineffective immigration policies**

Co-researchers described what they perceived to be an uncontrolled invasion of their communities by large groups of foreigners. Analysts pointed to a massive influx of illegal foreigners as a result of the government’s failure to control its borders as a factor that precipitated the violence. There is evidence that migration had increased as a result of the crisis in Zimbabwe (Crush & Tevera (eds) 2010).

The South African Institute of Race Relations argued that, “Poor policy decisions and simple incompetence in border policing ... contributed directly to the presence of a large

illegal population in South Africa. Without adequate legal standing in the community, these people became easy or soft targets for mob violence” (SAIRR 2008).

There was speculation that the violence was triggered by a massive influx of immigrants during the period preceding it. There was talk of a “human tsunami”, with the country being “flooded” by millions of undocumented migrants from the rest of Africa, particularly from Zimbabwe (Crush & Ramachandran 2009:16).

The basis for this narrative about an influx of foreign migrants is recorded in chapter 3 of this study. Within this discourse of uncontrolled illegal immigration there is a belief that immigrants are competing for jobs and resources in an economy that is conceptualised as a zero-sum entity (Cross, Mafukidze & Hoosen 2008; Steinberg 2008).

#### **5.4.3 Competition for jobs and other resources**

The perceptions of co-researchers, that foreigners are stealing jobs and economic opportunities, reflects a dominant discourse in South Africa that describes undocumented foreign migrants taking jobs from South Africans. Within the consensus over the existence of this discourse, there is debate over the extent to which it reflects myth or reality (Crush (ed) 2008).

Landau (2012) points out that there are established state discourses blaming foreign migrants for many of the country’s socio-economic problems. These are echoed by citizens, who claim that the foreigners among them constitute a threat to their lives and livelihoods – even in the absence of direct evidence for this.

Vigneswaran (2007:144) observes that these perceptions focus on crime, illegality and “the image of a subtle invasion of South African territory”. The presence of foreign migrants also constitutes “illegitimate” competition for scarce resources and opportunities, such as jobs, businesses, houses, social services and women (Misago et al 2009).

A report issued by the Global Commission for International Migration (GCIM) argued that certain economic sectors “... have come to rely to a significant extent on migrants with irregular status, who are prepared to work in difficult, dangerous and dirty jobs with little security and low wages” (GCIM 2005: 36).

This discourse is creating a sense of displacement that builds upon the displacement of colonialism and apartheid. Democracy has not brought a new era, rather it has ushered in a new variety of economic marginalisation. In studies elsewhere, the intensity of conflict arises from the perception of legitimate and illegitimate competition and does not depend on real competition in the job market (Belanger & Pinard 1991).

Crush (ed) (2008:4) is dismissive of claims about loss of employment and argues that very few respondents in the study conducted by SAMP had actually lost a job to a foreigner, or actually knew anyone who had lost a job to a foreigner. However, Kerr and Durrheim (2013) show that at least in the case of the 2010 violence against foreigners in De Doorns, claims about competition for jobs are not a myth. The response to the question in the SAMP study (Crush (ed) 2008) suggests that the wrong question was asked. First, it can only elicit a positive response from someone who has had a job, and then lost it. It marginalises the voices of the unemployed poor and those involved in informal economic activity. In most employment contexts it is also difficult, if not impossible to have detailed knowledge of who is employed *after* you lose your employment. Greater insight into this discourse might have been provided by empirically investigating whether foreigners have jobs that might otherwise be available to South Africans, and whether South Africans had the skills and experience to perform these jobs. In many employment contexts it is very difficult to know who was given your job or lost a job to a foreigner. This question cannot be answered by the person, as it is hypothetical but it could be answered by empirical research

The categorisation of some of the stories about foreigners as myths, and then dismissing the story, is in itself problematic. It does not really matter if these stories are myths. What matters is whether they are believed or not. Human history has shown that one person's myth is another person's reality – often a reality that provides a sense of meaning and coherence.

The small size of the towns in the Nxuba District enabled me to visit most of the businesses and ask owners and managers about the employment of foreigners. I discovered that at least thirty five foreigners had formal employment in the towns themselves. The majority of these were Zimbabweans. There are certainly more foreigners working on farms in the district. At least one farm, owned by white ex-Zimbabweans employed a number of Zimbabwean migrants. However, the majority of the foreigners I met were all

entrepreneurs. I asked local businessmen who employed foreigners in Bedford what they paid Zimbabweans. They showed me records that indicated that they paid the Zimbabweans the same, and in one case slightly more than they would pay local workers. They said that the attraction of Zimbabwean workers was not that they worked for less, but that they worked hard and were unlikely to strike or participate in trade unions.

## **5.5 Stories of belonging**

Interviews with co-researchers revealed a dual frustration about the issue of belonging. They feel as though they are excluded and marginalised in their own country, while foreigners, who do not belong, thrive. Discourses on who belongs in communities and who does not arise from the exclusionary politics of apartheid. Broader discourses of exclusion are reflected in legal frameworks such as the country's constitution, as well as in popular nationalist and nativist discourse. There is also a public discourse in South Africa that views the country as different from the rest of Africa. These discourses provide resources for the discursive creation of foreigners.

### **5.5.1 South African exceptionalism**

Mamdani (1996) and Neocosmos (2008) have identified what they argue is a dominant and arrogant public discourse that views South Africa as being more like a European or Latin American country because of its greater levels of industrialisation and its liberal democracy. South Africa has historically separated itself from the rest of Africa (Adedeji 1996). The apartheid era was one of in which strong boundaries were created to isolate South Africa from the rest of Africa, and resulted in black South Africans experiencing seclusion from other Africans (Morris 1998).

Proponents of this explanation for the violence against foreigners have argued that South Africa is not regarded as typically African by many South Africans. The cultural and intellectual frame of reference for South Africa is Europe and the USA more than it is the rest of Africa. This is partially a product of white dominance under apartheid, but it also reflects South Africa's economic and political position relative to the rest of the continent. In this discourse, South Africa is more 'advanced' than other African countries. Africa is regarded as different, and therefore as the place of the other (Murray 2003; Neocosmos 2008:590). This exceptionalism is responsible for the idea that Africans (i.e. those from the rest of Africa) do not belong here. They are intruders.

Prior to the post-apartheid era many white South Africans did not really regard South Africa as part of Africa, “It was a ‘Western’ society that just happened, accidentally and inconsequentially, if irritatingly, to be situated at the foot of the dark continent” (Lazarus 2004:610).

Lazarus (2004) argues that this exceptionalism has taken on a different form in the post-apartheid era: the expectation the South Africa would not fall victim to Africa’s problems of underdevelopment, but would rather be able to solve these problems and thus control its own fate.

### **5.5.2 South Africa’s history and the politics of exclusion**

South African nationalism has an anti-rural and pro-urban character. During the apartheid era white lives were valued and urbanised, while black lives were devalued and ruralised. The post-apartheid state has shifted this rural/urban binary opposition to Africa/South Africa, reflecting the exceptionalist discourse that South Africa is urban and modern and Africa rural and backward (Neocosmos 2008).

During the apartheid era black people were excluded from urban areas. These were seen as the domain of white people and black South Africans were only allowed access to urban areas to clean the houses, tend the gardens, or work in the businesses of white people. The basic rights of citizenship were withheld from black people in the cities. If they were not authorised to be there they were seen as a threat (Misago, Monson, Polzer & Landau 2010).

Vast numbers of black people were pushed into the economic periphery of the Bantustan ‘homelands’. The end of apartheid influx control saw people from the Bantustans come to the cities in search of economic opportunities. This placed pressure on already under-resourced communities and created social divisions between those who belong and those who do not (Nieftagodien 2008; Monson 2015). When outsiders compete for scarce resources, they threaten the interests of insiders. This competition for the same resources in shared social environment generates perceptions of African foreigners as prototypical outsiders and as a threat to the insiders. This leads to their often violent exclusion (Nieftagodien 2008). Nieftagodien shows how local leaders in Alexandra reacted to migrants from rural areas by invoking the discourse of outsider and the need for their removal as “an appropriate means of effecting development” (Nieftagodien 2008:72).

A similar tension between long term residents and newcomers has been described between “Cape borners”, people born in Cape Town, and those who have migrated from the Eastern Cape. Large scale migration from the Eastern Cape has created competition for jobs and placed a strain on the resources of communities. “Cape borners” refer to Eastern Cape people as *amagoduka* (people who are in the cities to seek employment) and *amaqaba* (uneducated people) (Barolsky 2012:145).

### 5.5.3 The legal exclusion of ‘Aliens’

Neocosmos (2006:98) argues that, “South African legislation has systematically provided the basis for a hegemonic xenophobic discourse within the country. The roots of the problem are to be found in the constitution itself which actually distinguishes between two categories of people: citizens and persons”. While this is not a unique distinction, both Neocosmos and Mosselson (2010) show how its application in South Africa stratifies the social order of the country.

Mosselson (2010) points out that although discourses of multiculturalism and inclusion are present in South Africa, exclusionary practices have defined, and continue to define, our society. The South African Constitution makes a distinction between persons and citizens. In particular, Section 36 of the South African Constitution, which deals with the suspension of removal of constitutional rights, is invoked to deal with illegal immigrants. He (2010:644) writes, “the 1999 White Paper on International Migration (which formed the basis of the current Immigration Act) points out, ‘alienage’ – being an illegal immigrant in South Africa – triggers this section of the Constitution and makes it legal to deprive illegal immigrants of basic human rights and due processes of law” (see Mokgoro 2010 for a rationale for the suspension of these rights).

Mosselson argues that this has placed illegal immigrants in a situation where they have no rights and are subject to abuse and harassment. He cites an interview with Human Rights Commissioner, Joyce Tlou, in 2008 in which she accedes that the only right that illegal immigrants have in South Africa is the right to life.

Mosselson (2010:646-7) refers to Section 41 of the Immigration Act of 2002, which distinguishes between citizens, residents, and foreigners and allows police to stop, search and even detain a person if they have grounds to believe a person is not in South Africa legally. Since there is no legislation that requires any person to carry identification in South

Africa, the Act effectively places all immigrants in an exceptional, extra-legal space. In effect, distinctions between legal and illegal migration are non-existent, and anyone suspected of being a foreigner is at risk of being treated as an illegal immigrant, with no protection from the state.

Through these measures, illegal immigrants have been politically and legally constructed as outside of the nation. They are regarded as threats and enemies by the state and this has resulted in extra-legal, often violent practices defining their existence in South Africa. What this shows, then, is that South African citizenship has been constructed in the presence of, and given form through, exclusion. It is this state-led practice that has come to shape both the community of immigrants/outside and the community that belongs, of South African citizens (Mosselson 2010:648).

Human rights and citizenship are interconnected, leaving undocumented migrants vulnerable because their status makes it virtually impossible to access the structures and institutions that protect human rights (Basok, Ilcan & Noonan 2006).

Klaaren (2012) provides an historical account of citizenship and the role played by the law. Klaaren (2012:138) argues that, “Xenophobia may well be the dark side of South African citizenship”. It arises from a notion of citizenship that is based on the intersection of residence and official status or lawfulness. Each of these enables xenophobia.

#### **5.5.4 Nationalism**

Discourses around nationalism and the right to space are present in the stories told about foreign migrants in South Africa. The questions of to whom South Africa belongs, and who belongs in South Africa have become central to social discourse.

Anderson’s (1983) analysis of the rise and spread of nationalism in early modern Europe provides insights into nationalistic discourses in South Africa. Anderson explored nationalism in terms of personal identity and sense of belonging and described nations as socially constructed “imagined communities”, imagined, “...because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983:15). In spite of this, members of a nation form deep attachments to each other and to the nation. For Anderson, the notion of a state involves the construction of various boundaries

that determine inclusion or exclusion. He (1983:5) writes, “States bind the nation they claim to represent by institutionalising identities of racial inclusion and exclusion”.

Anderson describes this imagined community as a political community with a common origin, historical experience and destiny. This in turn creates a community of shared interests. Nations become imagined communities of solidarity, with clear territorial boundaries. Within these boundaries, certain collective goods belong to members of the nation, particularly political, social and economic rights. The result is a state that is, in a sense, owned by the people.

Wimmer (1997) proposes an explanation for xenophobia in Europe that is based on Anderson’s notion of the imagined community, and that may provide insight into the South African phenomenon. He argues that a nation is the “outcome of a successful compromise of interests between different social groups: an exchange of the guarantee of political loyalty for the promise of participation and security” (1997:29). However, certain crises may disrupt this social agreement, particularly when economic or political changes unsettle the balance of forces between the different groups:

In the eyes of the xenophobes there is a zero-sum game to be played over the collective goods gained by joint work, a fight for the institutionalized promises of solidarity. The 'others' become strangers, intruders in an ideal community of nation or race - even the true causes of the breakup of this communal harmony and therefore responsible for the many insecurities that the future seems to bring. A kind of 'moral panic' spreads, to borrow a term from Prina Werbner (1996), the fear of a chaotic breakdown of the social world triggered by the released flood of foreigners (Wimmer 1997:30).

Xenophobic discourse functions to reassure identity, but is essentially part of a political struggle about who has the right to be cared for by the state. It is a fight for the collective goods of the modern state.

### **5.5.5 Nativist discourse**

Within nationalistic discourse on the presence of foreigners in South Africa there is an increased tendency towards an autochthonous understanding of what constitutes a nation (Nieftagodien 2012; Monson 2015). This is reflected in discourses around who is indigenous, and who ‘belongs’ in a nation. The notion of autochthony refers to the concern about what is indigenous to a place or nation, and therefore what has a legitimate claim to exist in that place or nation (Geschiere 2009).

Geschiere's (2009) observations from his analysis of autochthony in West Africa and Europe are informative. According to Geschiere, Rapid globalisation has resulted in a renewed prominence of the local. Increased mobility and migration, neo-liberal policies of decentralisation, and democratisation have contributed to what he describes as "an obsession with belonging" (2009:17). Within the broader culture and politics of cosmopolitanism created by globalisation, there is increased exclusion and a focus on the politics of difference. The migration of people may elicit fears among those who see themselves as the original inhabitants. Claims of being the authentic or original residents are made to exclude outsiders and protect the interests of the autochthon.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) identify two parallel discourses in South Africa – a negative discourse in relation to migrants and a negative discourse in relation to non-indigenous plants. They juxtapose these discourses in developing their theory about the alien in South Africa. The nature of the connection between alien plants and foreign migrants gives rise to some of their conclusions being rather tenuous, but not without merit.

According to the Comaroffs, aliens, whether they are people or plants, symbolise contradictions of belonging and boundedness. The language of the alien offers new ways of expressing discrimination in a civil rights culture. Their analysis of these discourses suggests the development of nativist of these discourses is that there is a movement towards nativist thinking, in terms of which only that which is indigenous to South Africa belongs in South Africa. Mbembe (2006) makes a strong case for a powerful nativist discourse that is gaining credence in South Africa, as does Neocosmos (2008).

Misago (2012:104) argues that, "The attacks reveal a violent 'nativist revivalism' resulting from a growing localised, territorialised, nationalistic and ethnic understanding of rights and entitlements". Klaaren (2012) points out that while a nativist discourse is not present at an institutional level in South Africa it is present in its popular discourse.

These nationalist and nativist discourses, through their construction of citizenship as autochthony, are contributing to a discursive creation of foreigners that is becoming increasingly broad in scope.

### 5.5.6 The discursive creation of foreigners

This legislative framework has resulted in a predominantly negative portrayal of foreigners which is reflected in both government and the media's discursive portrayals of foreigners as "aliens" or "illegals" (Harris 2002). Foreigners have come to be regarded as a social evil that can be blamed for many of the problems facing South Africans. Matsinhe (2011:295) notes that, "Since the collapse of apartheid, the phantom of Makwerekwere has been constructed and deployed in and through public discourse to render Africans from outside the borders orderable as the nation's bogeyman".

Hayem (2013) argues that there has been a shift in South Africa from an inclusive notion of national subjectivity to a dialectical notion which represents nationals against foreigners. She suggests that the government has contributed to the emergence of these attitudes, particularly through what she calls its mismanagement of the 2008 attacks on foreigners.

Banda and Mawadza (2015) scrutinise discursive strategies used by the South African print media in their reporting on Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa. They use critical discourse analysis to expose discourses of exclusion in newspaper headlines and stories, and argue that the presence of such discourses has contributed to the social production of a psycho-social condition of moral panic. Moral panic occurs when events, or other people, are seen as a threat to social values and interests and is created by political and religious leaders and media to defend society from the menace posed by whatever has been defined as a threat (Banda & Mawadza 2015).

Banda and Mawadza (2015) show how the discursive creation of Zimbabwean migrants by the media begins with language of "us/our" and "them" that constitutes immigrants as an outgroup. With this boundary set in place, language is used that suggests a crisis. The numbers of immigrants are "overwhelming", "flood" of them "flocking" over our border. The use of words like "exodus" evokes the biblical migration of an entire nation; the idea that this exodus is "smothering" South Africa contributes to the sense of crisis. There is a "cost" as they "compete" for jobs and other resources. Government services are "struggling to cope". Words and phrases like "taking over", "stripping us of our livelihood" are used. Headlines report that "Foreigners are looting SA coffers" and people are quoted as saying things like "foreigners are stealing our birthright". Banda and Mawadza observe that:

The discursive strategy is to depict South Africans as helpless victims and Zimbabwean immigrants as powerful aggressors. Sources that are quoted are often

not named, or subjected to verification, while the articles do not present alternative viewpoints or the perspective of foreigners, thereby giving their reports an illusion of reliability (Banda & Mawadza 2015:55-56).

Through these discourses the media creates a moral panic with regard to issues such as employment, access to housing, healthcare, and crime. The public imagination is seized with images of the threat of floods of foreigners invading the country (see also Murray 2003).

It is interesting that the language used by co-researchers echoes the media discourses documented by Banda and Mawadza. There is the same dichotomy between “us/our” and “them” in the language used. For co-researchers, “our people”, “our economy”, and “our livelihoods” are under threat from the outgroup. Verbs like “killing” us “stealing” our jobs are used, along with words like “flooded”.

To attempt to determine the extent to which media discourse constructs broader public discourse, and to what extent it merely reflects it, is problematic. It may be more accurate to understand them both as simultaneously reflecting and shaping each other.

#### *5.5.6.1 Shifts in discourse on foreigners*

Over the period of my research interviews, from 2013 to 2015, it has been interesting to observe changes in discourse on foreigners, particularly with regard to the scope with which the word is used. In 2013 the word ‘foreigner’ was used by co-researchers to refer to migrants from other parts of Africa. One exception was Buntu, who asked why people from the USA, Europe and China were not and expressed concerns about the Chinese.

By February 2015, five of the co-researchers had told me that they believed that white South Africans were also foreigners, who should go back to Europe. The same accusations were levelled at white South Africans: that they were stealing opportunities, jobs and resources from black South Africans and that they did not belong in South Africa. The notion that white people are ‘settlers’, ‘immigrants’ and ‘foreigners’ who do not belong is increasingly reflected in social discourse.

*Unathi: We need to think about who this land really belongs here, and who has come here but does not belong. The thing is that foreigners like white people live better than us in our own country.*

*Andile: You white people need to give us back our land and resources. This is not your land, yet we know that you are exploiting it and making lots of money that you send back to Europe.*

*Sipho: We are always oppressed by these foreigners. We are oppressed by whites. Now we are oppressed by Zimbabweans and Somalis. Foreigners must go back where they belong.*

There was an increased animosity towards white South Africans. It included the use of names that were derogatory, such as “*amabhunu*”<sup>7</sup> or the phrase, “pink pigs”, which I had not encountered before.

*Odwa: Yes, they call them “pink pigs” because, you know, that is their colour. They say they must go back to Europe. Start swimming now before there is trouble.*

It is interesting that Odwa used the word “they” when describing what some of his people were saying about white people. It created distance between himself and the words. He later admitted that he agreed with the sentiments, but that he experienced discomfort in overtly identifying with them in conversation with me because he did not want to show disrespect to me.

This new discourse on foreigners is reflected in a number of statements made in The South African Institute of Race Relations' Rainbow Index, compiled by Jeffrey (2013), which shows that while racial goodwill was higher after 1994, there has been a decline in racial goodwill to below the figures for the pre-1994 apartheid era. The report cites racial rhetoric, among other causes, for this and quotes Julius Malema's comment that “whites must surrender their land and mineral resources — through bloodshed if necessary” as an example of this (2013:30). Malema made similar remarks at a political rally in Mdantsane on 14 April 2014, suggesting that genocide against whites was possible if whites did not return stolen land soon and tested the patience of black South Africans.

Given South Africa's history of violence towards foreigners, this new construction of ‘foreigner’ creates the possibility that violence may expand to be directed at white South Africans as well as migrants from other parts of Africa.

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<sup>7</sup> From the Afrikaans “boer”, or farmer.

### **5.5.7 Nationalistic discourse as an account for the eviction of foreigners**

When located within these discourses of nationalism, attempts to violently expel foreigners are a means of protecting the integrity and interests of the nation, and more specifically, an autochthonous notion of the nation.

Monson (2012) found that in Alexandra, one of the three communities involved in her study, the violence wasn't seen as a form of protest against the state. It was driven by perceptions that the removal of foreigners protected the integrity of the nation. It was seen by people as an attempt to reinforce the state's authority and support its immigration policy by expelling undocumented foreigners rather than some form of rebellion.

## **5.6 Stories of entitlement**

The co-researchers in this study all expressed frustration that government was not delivering the houses, jobs, and services to which they felt entitled. They communicated a deep-seated dependence on the government to change the conditions of their lives, and an absence of any sense of personal agency.

### **5.6.1 Rights discourse in South Africa**

There is a "rights discourse" in South Africa that regards the state as the primary agent responsible for the protection, advancement and realisation of rights (Thomas 2010: 32). The ANC harnessed the notion of rights as part of their strategy against racially based segregation and oppression. They adopted the African Bill of Rights in 1923, followed by African Claims in 1943, and the Freedom Charter in 1955. The constitution's protection of social and economic rights is in many ways an extension of these documents.

The South African Constitution moves beyond liberal rights traditions that generally recognise individual rights to life, liberty and property, to recognise broader social and economic rights. This reflects the United Nations adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which included socio-economic and cultural rights as well as individual freedoms and civil and political rights. More particularly, it reflects the notion of citizenship rights developed by Marshall that emphasised the collective rather than the individual and stressed the need for governments to provide a certain level of welfare and

security to those classes of society that were relatively poor or vulnerable. The impact of Marshall's thought is seen in the development of what are termed "welfare states", particularly in Western Europe (Thomas 2008).

The ANC government's Reconstruction and Development Programme promised houses and other basic services to South Africans. These promises were amplified in successive ANC election campaigns. The 2004 ANC Election Manifesto (ANC 2004) promised jobs, a growing economy, expanded social security, and faster delivery of services such as housing, sanitation, water and electricity. In its 2009 Election Manifesto (ANC 2009), Referring to the Freedom Charter, the ANC promised jobs, better livelihoods, food security, land reform, and improved access to quality health and education. However, a lack of delivery leaves South Africans feeling angry and frustrated (Sokuta 2011; Managa 2012).

Rights such as housing, food, water, and social assistance are protected by the constitution. Thomas (2010:34) points out that the state's responsibility to actually deliver on these rights for all citizens is limited by the extent of finances. In addition to this, the ANC government has embraced neo-liberal economic policies that rely on market forces for the realisation of these rights. Housing Minister Lindiwe Sisulu described the challenge faced by government when she said, "There is only so much money that the government has. This cake has to be shared equally among competing interests" (cited in Thomas 2010:35).

The nuanced manner in which the constitution protects the right to housing may not be grasped by the many homeless people who are waiting for houses. This was seen in a case heard by the Constitutional Court, where nine hundred squatters, led by Irene Grootboom invaded privately owned land in an attempt to further their demands for housing. The court disputed the claimants' understanding that the right to housing was absolute and reiterated that it was dependant on the state's financial resources (Butterworths Constitutional Law Reports, 11 (2000)).

Thomas (2010:37-8) argues that, "Currently, what 'rights discourse' amounts to is that the poor are to wait patiently for the state's available resources to benefit them. Such circumstances certainly can fuel the eruption of spontaneous, violent housing protests given the trend in adjudication". Promises are being repeatedly made at election time, but delivery is delayed. Delivery is impeded by the limits of state financial resources, but it is also restricted by the illegitimate diversion of funds through corruption and wasteful expenditure.

## 5.6.2 Discourses of dependence

Most of the co-researchers used words like “lazy” or “dependent” on grants to describe what they perceived to be a lack of economic initiative compared to the entrepreneurial enterprise of the foreigners in their communities. This was not the only explanation; it was often accompanied by their perception that they did not have the skills to start or run small businesses and that this explained their passivity and dependence on income from grants. These multifaceted discourses resist simplistic analysis and labels. It is, however, worth exploring some of the factors that have contributed to this narrative in order to understand it better.

It could be argued that, by exercising power over black South Africans, the apartheid government fostered dependence on the state because powerlessness creates dependence. Under apartheid, black people were excluded from the economy and could not access funding from financial institutions. This created an institutionalised dependence on the state, which was documented by the de Loor Commission in 1992 (Thomas 2010:38).

Laburn-Pearl describes the entitlement that resulted from state attempts to house the urban poor during the apartheid era, “... entitlement also means relinquishing control over a part of one’s life. For in handing over responsibility to others, one leaves decision making to others, and one waits for action by others. One becomes a mere recipient in the development process” (cited in Thomas 2010:38).

For a black person during apartheid, taking the initiative to change one’s circumstances was difficult, if not impossible. In a phenomenon described as “learned helplessness”, exposure to continued circumstances where one has no control impedes learning and agency in future circumstances, even if they differ in nature (Seligman & Maier 1967). Evans et al (2005) built on the work of Seligman and Maier and showed that learned helplessness helps us understand the impact of poverty on people. An absence of control leads to less investigation of the options that are available to a person. When personal agency or exploration is either impossible, or is not rewarded, repeated disappointments discourage future acts of exploration.

This sense of helplessness is associated with an external locus of control. Locus of control describes the expectation that outcomes have a contingent relationship with one’s

behaviour (Ryon & Gleason 2014). Locus of control influences the level of stress experienced by people facing challenging circumstances. People with an external locus of control, who believe their lives are out of their control, experience greater levels of stress and the negative effects of stress (Ryon & Gleason 2014).

Weyers (2011:94-5), based on a fairly extensive review of literature on community development in South Africa, argues that in contexts that are full of problems and needs, such as environments of poverty, people tend to see themselves as victims who have little control over their lives and circumstances. There is a need to “unlearn” learned helplessness and take greater ownership of their current situation. This may involve becoming aware of the outcomes of current behaviours and attitudes.

### **5.6.3 The Impact of Social Assistance**

Co-researchers spoke of their dependence on social grants. Most of the co-researchers were involved in the Community Works Programme, a government initiative to provide social assistance and alleviate poverty. All of those who received social assistance explained that while the money they received was not enough to live on, they could at least buy food for their families, and sometimes afford items such as clothing, airtime, cigarettes and alcohol.

The delivery of social assistance is an area where the government has performed well. Since 1994 the South African government has embarked on a programme aimed at improving the economic circumstances of historically disadvantaged citizens. Included in this have been targeted initiatives that aim to improve the living standards of the poorest citizens. The most significant of these initiatives is social assistance in the form of a Child Support Grant, Old Adult Pension, and Disability grants (Surender & Van Niekerk 2008:325). These social grants are a form of social protection that not only alleviate poverty and provide a safety net for the poor, but also speed up social transformation (Neves, Samson, van Niekerk, Hlatshwayo, & du Toit 2009:4).

While some co-researchers spoke of grants as a source of laziness or dependence, the picture that emerges from research is less clear. Social grants have decreased levels of poverty and reduced the vulnerability of beneficiaries (Hangen-Zanker, Morgan & Meth 2011). Surender, Noble, Wright and Ntshongwana (2010:210-213) show that there is little evidence to indicate that supports the notion that grants discourage recipients from seeking

employment. Issues that prevent people seeking employment are structural barriers such as geographical location, transportation, nepotism, and corruption.

In South Africa, grants have resulted in a perception that the government is an agent that is personally involved in people's lives. While there was an abdication of responsibility to the state and attitudes of entitlement among some recipients, for most it increased agency and made it more likely that recipients would access additional economic opportunities (Plagerson, Harpham & Kielmann 2012; Neves et al 2009).

Woolard Harttgen and Klasen (2011) highlight the redistributive nature of social assistance. They argue that many households would not be sustainable in the absence of grants. They show that grants have had a considerable impact on poverty reduction, and that reduced levels of poverty in South Africa can be attributed to social assistance. There is also evidence that grants improve health and education outcomes. There is mixed evidence on whether grants create a disincentive to look for work (see also Potts 2012).

Grants have failed to address the structural problems that made them necessary. As a result people become dependent on them. Unlike some welfare states, where grants are a form of temporary assistance, grants in South Africa have become an essential component of social structure, they are "politically irreversible pillars of social policy" (Devereux & Lund 2010:165). In a similar vein, Khan (2013) argues that the ANC government's social assistance programme is failing to redress injustices and inequities, safeguard social and political stability, or develop social inclusivity.

Bernstein (2014:32) cites evidence that effective social safety nets can make beneficiaries more reluctant to work. She points out that massive state spending on welfare is accompanied by a lack of economic opportunities and an education system that is failing. As a consequence of this, even if people have the desire to find work they are impeded by their education and the lack of opportunities. The result is that they remain dependant on welfare.

#### *5.6.3.1 Gaps in social assistance and their impact*

While it is important to assess the impact of the grants on those who receive them, an important issue that cannot be neglected is those excluded from the net. Khan (2013) points out that despite the positive contribution made by grants, they do not provide any assistance for able-bodied people who are unable to find formal employment.

Young black men, in particular, find themselves excluded from social assistance in the form of grants. One co-researcher expressed frustration at this, and questioned why the government had forgotten about him. Plagerson et al (2012) found that unemployed men had negative attitudes to the child support grants received by their partners and felt threatened by them.

While many young, unemployed black men live in households that are supported by grants, this may contribute to a sense of impotence and uselessness. Siphokazi described how some of her boyfriends did not like the fact that all of the household income came from social assistance that she received because it gave her control of the finances, with the result that “they say now I am wearing the pants in the home and there is only room for one man”. This reflects both a patriarchal culture, and the frustration of men who are unable to perform what they understand to be their role as breadwinner and head of the home.

Zondi (2008) points to the resentment that the poor black youth harbour for being marginalised from the rest of society, excluded from the economy, and neglected by the state. Morudu, writing in the Business Day newspaper, describes the social reality of young black men:

Nearly 20 years after South Africa buried apartheid, the face of anger and desperation is once again largely that of the black man . . . [H]e is a young man with no job, who lives in a shack, has little education and no marketable skills and, crucially, is excluded from the social grant system. The police target him with assault rifles . . . Yet all he wants is a job and a decent life (Morudu 2013).

#### **5.6.4 Poor service delivery**

Co-researchers expressed their frustration that they had not received jobs, houses, and other services promised by the state. A number of explanations for the violence against foreigners focus on the failure of the state to bring about development in poor areas. There is a “tolerance threshold” when people have not received benefits of citizenship they perceive as an entitlement (Crush (ed) 2008; Neocosmos 2008; Glaser 2008b).

Crush and Ramachandran (2009:16) argue that poor service delivery is behind the violence, “the failures of the government to deal with endemic poverty, joblessness, lack of shelter and basic services had led to the scapegoating of foreign migrants by frustrated citizens”. In a similar vein, Altman (2008) argues that the high levels of

structural unemployment have led to high levels of frustration among South African youth.

#### *5.6.4.1 The politics of protests*

Nieftagodien (2008) regards the violence as a form of protest. It is the poor making their voices heard at the failures of local government. In a similar vein, Glaser argues that the violence represents an uprising that was “profoundly democratic” in the populist sense of that word (2008b:53).

The violence against foreigners is taking place in a context of violent protest over a lack of service delivery. People living in shacks in informal settlements engage in violent protest as part of their struggle to get government to prioritise their needs when distributing resources (Von Holdt, Langa, Molapo, Mogapi, Ngubeni, Dlamini & Kirsten 2011). Von Holdt argues that the violence against foreigners “shares some elements with protest violence” but “seems to draw from repertoires of more personal violence by vigilantes against criminals, who are not infrequently beaten or burnt to death, as well as from antiapartheid repertoires such as the necklacing of izimpimpi” (Von Holdt et al. 2011: 28–29).

Dysfunctional local leadership and the absence of leaders due to their involvement in protests and demonstrations creates opportunities for both organised and opportunistic crime (Misago 2012; Monson 2015). In this way, violent community protests may become occasions for criminal activity.

Schuld (2013) argues that the distinction between violence and crime in post-conflict societies is conceptual rather than empirical in nature, and refers to research which shows that post-conflict societies may experience levels of violence comparable to those experienced during times of civil war. Violence that was recorded and discussed as political, conflict related violence becomes criminal violence. She points out that political violence or crime are categories referring to motives, which are very difficult to analyse, and “the actors themselves are often not of a mere ‘political’ or ‘criminal’ kind” (Schuld 2013:61).

## 5.7 Stories of comparison

Co-researchers used the relative affluence of many foreigners as a benchmark for measuring the lack of economic progress in their own lives. Comparisons were also made with the circumstances and lifestyles of white South Africans. These comparisons increased feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction with their own lives and circumstances.

### 5.7.1 Poverty and relative deprivation

There are approaches to understanding the violence that argue that poverty and inequality are the key factors that help us to understand the attacks. These explanations claim that the perception of many South Africans is that foreigners and ‘outsiders’ are in a more favourable socio-economic position than themselves. These are often based on Gurr’s (1970; 1980) “relative deprivation” theory. Gurr presented the concept of relative deprivation to explain the psychological motives that motivate violent behaviour. It is the level of unhappiness about “a perceived discrepancy between men’s value expectations and their value capabilities” (Gurr 1970:13). It describes the gap between the material good and life conditions to which people believe they are entitled, and those they are able to achieve or maintain, given then constraints of their context. The emphasis in Gurr’s theory is on perception, and the greater the perceived deprivation, the greater the discontent and the greater the likelihood of political violence.

Pillay (2008) and Gelb (2008) insist that the increased levels of inequality in post-apartheid South Africa create a sense of relative deprivation and breed a sense of entitlement, which in turn generates social instability. The effects of poverty are amplified by times of economic recession, such as those experienced preceding the attacks. There was increased economic pressure in 2008. Substantial increases in the price of food and other basic commodities were recorded in the months before the attacks on foreigners (South African Press Association 2008). The price for basic foodstuffs had increased dramatically; the price of brown bread had risen by 16.21%, white bread 19.92%, and maize by between 22.29% and 28%. Some analysts attributed the violence to increased economic hardship, and greater competition for resources, as a result of this (Geffen 2008).

## 5.8 Stories told by leaders

### 5.8.1 Elite leadership discourse

The role of discourses produced by national elites in the mobilisation of violence against foreigners has been highlighted by a number of researchers (Hayem 2013; Mosselson 2010; Neocosmos 2006, 2008). South African leaders have a history of self-serving and convenient scapegoating of foreign migrants, whether it be the inflation of immigration statistics (Crush & Williams 2001; Palmary 2002), xenophobic attitudes within the police (see Newham, Masuku & Dlamini 2006; Vigneswaran 2012) and Home Affairs (Palmary 2002). The state has tended to criminalise African foreign nationals as “illegals”, “illegal aliens”, “illegal immigrants”, “criminals” and “drug traffickers” or claim that their presence drains state resources that would otherwise be available to improve the lives of South Africa’s poor.

The statements referenced below are illustrative rather than exhaustive, and locate recent statement made by Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini within this broader leadership discourse.

In 1994, then Minister of Home Affairs, Mangosuthu Buthelezi made the statement that, “If South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with the millions of aliens that are pouring into South Africa, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme” (quoted in Croucher 1998: 650).

In 1997 Defence Minister Joe Modise posed a question with regard to the role of the army to assist the police get rid of crime and violence in the country, “However, what can we do? We have one million illegal immigrants in our country who commit crimes and who are mistaken by some people for South African citizens. That is the real problem” (quoted in Human Rights Watch, 1998:124).

In 1997 Buthelezi argued that, “South Africa is faced with another threat, and that is the SADC ideology of free movement of people, free trade and freedom to choose where you live or work. Free movement of persons spells disaster for our country” (quoted in Misago et al 2009:16).

In 2002, Billy Masetlha, the director general of Home Affairs discussion of illegal immigration conflated it with criminality, he said that, “approximately 90 per cent of

foreign persons who are in RSA with fraudulent documents, i.e., either citizenship or migration documents, are involved in other crimes as well ... it is quicker to charge these criminals for their false documentation and then to deport them than to pursue the long route in respect of the other crimes that are committed” (quoted in Misago et al 2009:16).

In 2004 the mayor of Johannesburg proposed in his State of the City speech that, “while migrancy contributes to the rich tapestry of the cosmopolitan city, it also places a severe strain on employment levels, housing, and public services” (quoted in Landau 2012:7).

Statements like these were compounded by the official state response to the 2008 violence, which was described as sporadic and half-hearted at best (Igglesden, Monson & Polzer 2009. Monson & Misago 2009:25-34). Mbeki’s xenophobia denialism, which insisted that this was nothing more than criminality (and it that sense simply an escalation of a phenomenon that is a ‘normal’ part of society), reinforced perceptions that the state was unwilling to engage decisively to end the violence against foreigners.

In January 2015 Water and Sanitation Minister, Nomvula Mokonyane, made the following comments about foreigners on Facebook, “Almost every second outlet (spaza) or even former general dealer shops are run by people of Somali or Pakistan origin in a yard that we know who the original owners were”. She added, “This phenomenon needs a coherent formal attention. Our townships cannot be a site of subtle takeover and build up for other situations we have seen in other countries. I am ready to state my view formally in defence of our communities” (quoted by South African Press Association 2015).

Shortly after her comments, foreign owned shops in Soweto were attacked and looted. The violence escalated and spread to other communities, albeit on a smaller scale. Government officials downplayed the role of xenophobia in the violence (Magubane 2015).

Following the attacks on foreign nationals and the looting of foreign owned shops in Soweto in January 2015, Minister of Small Business Development, Lindiwe Zulu, had the following to say, “foreigners need to understand that they are here as a courtesy and our priority is to the people of this country first and foremost. A platform is needed for business owners to communicate and share ideas. They cannot barricade

themselves in and not share their practices with local business owners” (quoted in Nyembezi 2015).

On 20 March 2015, at a moral regeneration event in Pongola, Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini called for foreign nationals to be deported, arguing that locals should not have to compete with people from other countries for the few economic opportunities that are available (Ndou 2015). Zwelithini is quoted as saying, “we must deal with our own lice. In our heads, let’s take out the ants and leave them in the sun. We ask that immigrants must take their bags and go where they come from”. He said that foreigners had brought untidiness and “filth” to South Africa’s streets (The Herald 2015).

Zwelethini’s speech was followed by a large scale outbreak of violence against African foreign migrants in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, where most of South Africa’s approximately six million Zulus live. The violence spread to parts of Gauteng, particularly Alexandra, where it was immortalised by the photographs of Mozambican Emmanuel Sithole being murdered.

The Democratic Alliance, South Africa’s official opposition party condemned the statements as highly irresponsible and called for a retraction and an apology. Not only did Zwelithini not apologise, his spokesman went on record to say the King had meant every word he said and nothing to apologise for. He insisted that Zwelethini’s words had been taken out of context and distorted. President Zuma’s son, Edward, also came out in support of King Zwelethini, saying he feared that South Africa was sitting on a ticking time bomb of foreigners taking over the country (Khoza 2015).

#### *5.8.1.1 Scapegoating*

The blaming of foreigners by elite leaders, for social decay, for crime, for government’s inability to deliver promised services, and for economic hardship as a consequence of illegitimate competition is reflected in a general scapegoating of foreigners.

Ten years before the 2008 attacks on foreigners, Morris (1998) proposes a thesis of scapegoating to explain emerging xenophobic attitudes in South Africa. South Africans, frustrated by poverty and unemployment, were blaming foreign nationals for crime, unemployment, and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The scapegoating thesis suggests that xenophobia occurs when indigenous populations

construct foreigners as the cause of their difficulties and direct the anger induced by their experience of hardship. Poor South Africans, frustrated with the reality that democracy hasn't brought the expected improvements to their life situations, target vulnerable outsiders and blame them for social ills (Duncan 2012; Reddy 2012).

#### *5.8.1.2 The work of thugs and criminals*

At the time of the 2008 violence, Minister of Home Affairs, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula went as far as to suggest the involvement of a "third force", evoking a struggle discourse that referred to agents deployed by the apartheid government to destabilise communities and the broader political sphere (*Pretoria News*, 14 May 2008, cited in Nieftagodien 2012:109 ). In 2008 the ANC's Gauteng provincial branch alleged that the anti-immigrant violence was politically motivated and targeted at the ANC. Ronnie Kasrils, the Minister of Intelligence, and Manala Manzini, the director general of the National Intelligence Agency, both supported these claims (Mhlana, Tolsi & Alcock 2008). Ten days later, Minister of Intelligence Ronnie Kasrils conceded that blaming "sinister forces" was erroneous (*Sunday Independent*, 25 May 2008 cited in Nieftagodien 2012:109)

Official government explanations have tended to downplay the role of xenophobia and argue that criminals are behind the violence. Former president Mbeki has repeatedly insisted that this is not xenophobia, but criminality, and remonstrated with those who called it xenophobia (Mbeki 2008; Mbeki 2010).

In 2010, after there had been threats of renewed violence against foreigners, Nathi Mthethwa the Minister of Police stated that "xenophobia is not going to happen...There is no such systematic thing as xenophobia in the country". After violence broke out in the Western Cape, he called it "so-called xenophobia" and issued a statement claiming that the police would deal firmly with "criminal elements, which disguise themselves as xenophobia". This denial of xenophobia was continued in a statement made by a police ministry spokesperson after a Zimbabwean man was stoned to death by local residents in Seshego, Limpopo, in June 2011, "Once you start talking about xenophobia and Afrophobia, you are talking about semantics. It is crime disguised under xenophobia" (quoted in Crush et al 2013:10).

This tendency to label violence against foreigners as simple criminality rather than xenophobia has persisted in government explanations of the violence, a recent

example being statements made by Gauteng Economic Development MEC<sup>8</sup>, Lebogang Maile, and Community Safety MEC, Sizakele Nkosi-Malobane, who claimed that the January 2015 attacks in Soweto were largely driven by criminality (Magubane 2015).

### **5.8.2 Failures of leadership at a local level**

While it was difficult to make explicit connections between elite leadership discourse and the stories of my co-researchers, the role of local leadership was clear. They spoke of an absence of effective leadership in the communities. Those in formal leadership structures were seen to be concerned with self-enrichment; they were largely uninterested in the problems experienced by their constituents. At times of heightened frustration within communities informal leaders became more prominent in their attempts to mobilise people to take action to solve the problems they faced. Such action tended to take the form of violent protest and confrontation. The two co-researchers from Duncan Village described the role of these informal leaders in inciting violence against foreigners.

Research conducted at the FMSP does not dismiss systemic causes or the existence of structural xenophobia, but argues that the violence against foreigners is the result of gaps in leadership at local level. Violence did not take place in communities with strong leadership that was linked to the state (Misago et al 2009; Misago et al 2010).

Misago (2012) points to the role of micro-politics in communities, in a context of prevailing xenophobia and a culture of impunity with regard to violent public protest. Within this context, structural conditions and prevalent attitudes of xenophobia within South Africa were enabling factors, but not causal factors of violence against foreigners. He argues that the micro-politics of affected areas, combined with the failure of local government structures are to blame for the violence. Misago (2012:103-4) argues that the distinctive characteristic of affected areas was the emergence of undemocratic and violent leadership structures that arose in the absence of strong and competent institutionalised leadership. Klaaren (2012) agrees that a lack of local leadership is one of the most persuasive explanations for the violence.

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<sup>8</sup> Member of Executive Council; each province in South Africa has an Executive Council, made up of the Premier and a number of MEC's, which functions as a provincial cabinet.

Misago (2012) attempts to move beyond generalisations by identifying specific enabling factors and triggers that shaped the May 2008 attacks on foreigners, as well as similar violence that occurred before and after these. He argues that while there are structural, historical, social and economic factors that enabled the violence, it was organised and led by local groups and individuals attempting to further their political and economic interests. The ability of leaders to foment anger and protests to further their own interests is compounded by the impunity with which rogue local leaders are able to act (Monson & Misago 2009).

Misago summarises the role of local leaders in violence against foreigners:

The triggers were political and leadership vacuums, lack of conflict resolution mechanism, and a culture of impunity. To take advantage of the opportunities these factors provide, local leaders (official and/or self appointed) and citizens mobilised discourses of nationality, political affiliation, ethnicity and territorial belonging to claim exclusive control over sub-national space (Misago 2012:105).

The key factor in explaining the escalation of violence is the role of local leaders, whether formal or informal. In communities where violence against foreigners occurred there are clear signs of the involvement of leaders and members of community structures in a “broad collective project to evict foreigners” (Monson 2015:145).

## **5.9 Stories about the absence of freedom**

The theme of freedom, and its absence, was ubiquitously present within co-researchers’ narratives on foreigners. This absence of freedom started with the government’s failure to deliver on promises of a better life, but extended to anger and frustration at foreigners who were experiencing this better life illegitimately.

### **5.9.1 Freedom as economic consumption**

Posel (2010) explores an emerging post-apartheid discourse in which freedom is constructed as a certain level of economic status and consumption. For Posel this conflation of freedom and consumption has its roots in the attempts by missionaries to “civilise” black people. She explores the historical inks between race and consumption in South Africa. Posel points out that modern consumption has always been linked to race in

South Africa. Colonial rulers allowed natives a degree of upward social mobility if they adopted European dress and manners. Thus, a certain kind of consumption came to be a marker of social respectability.

The creation of new needs was instrumental in attracting black people into employment for wages. Many of these people adopted the Western markers of “civilisation”, particularly in their adoption of Christianity and their manner of dress, which was a form of “social obedience” (Burke 2005:135).

Modern consumption refers to acquiring and using things, the context in which this occurs, and its cultural, political and psychological effects. She lists the defining elements of this as the consumption of commodities, the manner in which these processes of consumption are a source of psychological social value as well as economic value, and the emergence of mass markets across class lines and the mass aspirations and desire to consume. These aspirations to consume are part of the construction and performance of selfhood (Posel 2010:161). Consumption is a critical site for the exercise of power, because modes of consumption are fundamental to a person’s sense of who they are and their place in society (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997:219).

Posel (2010:168) describes how, under apartheid, social and economic inequalities were both legitimised by racial hierarchies and used as evidence of the existence of those hierarchies. She writes, “from this perspective, then, whiteness was an entitlement to privilege and relative affluence; blackness became an official judgement about being unworthy of certain modes and orders of consumption”. This led to what has been described as “racial impersonation, in which African people imitated the lifestyles and values of their white counterparts in order to improve their social standing” (Magubane 2004:168).

The acquisition and display of Western commodities has been a symbolic “battleground” in black people’s struggle against economic exploitation and political domination. It enabled strategies of racial positioning that were simultaneously more forceful and more subversive in their challenging of power (Burke 2005:184).

Posel (2010:160) argues that the racial order in South Africa was constituted in part, and maintained, by the regulation of consumption. Furthermore, the country’s racial order regulated and limited people’s aspirations and power as consumers. She writes, “The

desire and power to consume was racialised, at the same time as it was fundamental in the very making of race. This interconnection in turn has had a profound bearing on the genealogy of varied and contested imaginings of ‘freedom’”. If blackness was constructed in some ways by restricted consumption, then discourses of enrichment could easily be conflated with the discourse of freedom (Posel 2010:173).

### **5.9.2 Freedom as affluence**

This understanding of freedom is reflected in the response of Smuts Ngonyama in 2007 in response to revelations that he had received millions of rand from an ethically dubious Telkom share transaction. His retort was, “I didn’t join the struggle to be poor” (in Posel 2010:157).

Posel (2010:158) reflects, “Ngonyama’s declaration invites us to revisit the question of the contested meanings of liberation in South Africa in an unfamiliar and unsettling way. He suggested, with unusual frankness and clarity, that for him, the struggle against apartheid was, in part, a struggle not just to transcend poverty, but to become rich; that freedom was expressed, in part, in acquisition”.

The emergence over the past two decades of not only a burgeoning black middle class, but of a super-rich black elite (Seekings & Nattrass 2006:308), has shaped social discourse on economic aspirations. Posel (2010:159) notes that, “included within their ranks are many erstwhile activists who were previously within the ANC’s Marxist fold, and who seem not to experience any discomfort at their sometimes spectacular enrichment”.

Joel Netshitenzhe’s description of the context in which the ANC attempted to bring about economic transformation provides insight into the emergence of this freedom discourse:

What does not receive sufficient attention is that we have to implement the programme of social transformation in an advanced capitalist society, and in a small open economy under conditions of globalisation. So, in large measure, we have to manage the socio-economic system and the programmes of change taking this reality into account. These programmes have to be undertaken in a society that has hitherto been characterised as Colonialism of a Special Type (with the colonisers or the metropolis and the colonised residing in one geographic entity, unlike in other former African colonies). As a result, we have to contend with lifestyles of the erstwhile metropolis (essentially the white community) that are profoundly pervasive.

Such lifestyles are based on a standard of living that is artificially high compared to today’s global “middle class”, in terms for instance of assets, number of cars

per household, domestic assistants, swimming pools, emulation of the European “gentry” and so on. In pursuit of non-racial equality, the Black middle and upper strata aspire to achieve that living standard of the metropolis; and many strive to do so in one fell swoop. Aggravating this is the global culture of short-termism in the conduct of business and material self-advancement” (Netshitenzhe 2012, cited in Gilder 2012).

This social phenomenon is reflected in Mbeki’s (2006) observation:

It is perfectly obvious that many in our society, having absorbed the value system of the capitalist market, have come to the conclusion that for them, personal success and fulfilment meant personal enrichment at all costs, and the most theatrical and striking public display of that wealth... The meaning of freedom has come to be defined, not by the seemingly ethereal and therefore intangible gift of liberty, but by the designer labels on the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, the spaciousness of our houses and our yards...

### **5.9.3 The allure of corruption as a means to acquire wealth**

While white affluence has become the measure of freedom, the phenomenon described by Netshitenzhe, where people try to achieve this affluence in one business deal, has led to rampant corruption and nepotism (Chipkin 2013; Gingerich 2014). Corruption and nepotism have, in turn, undermined the capacity of government to deliver services and improve the lives of the poor (Chipkin 2013; Gingerich 2014; Van Vuuren 2014).

Gilder (2012), describes the conundrum faced by those in government,

Those of us who came out of exile or prisons or the liberation movement underground or out of the metaphoric dungeons of economic, social and political deprivation into the sudden freedom of the 1990’s arrived into a world and a system that had set standards and expectations and objectives for freedom that trapped us before we had a chance to know what hit us and to apply some sort of moral compass.

### **5.9.4 The discursive construction of freedom**

A discourse of “total” or “complete” freedom was articulated in the 1999, 2004 and 2009 ANC election manifestos (ANC 1999, ANC 2004, ANC 2009). This encompassed political, economic, and social freedom. Housing, the provision of services, education, and social grants are argued to constitute social freedom. The ANC has consistently framed freedom in this way, and promised to deliver it to people (Bojabetseha & Moloji 2014:98-99). However, for the majority of South Africans this ideal of freedom remains elusive. Bojabetseha and Moloji (2014:94) argue that, “the various discursive or symbolic

constructions or presentations of the ANC, which serve an ideological function of reproducing dominant political relations in South Africa, are challenged and even negated by reality”.

As noted in chapter 3, of South Africa’s 14.7 million households, more than 7 million spent less than R1799 a month. While only 0.8% of whites were poor in 2012 (if poverty is defined as per capita income of less than R1450 a month), 42% of blacks fell into this category. This poverty is accentuated by its juxtaposition with white affluence, by the growth of a black middle class, and by the emergence of a super-rich black elite who have amassed extraordinary wealth very quickly.

Ispas (2015) records remarks made by Julius Malema, leader of the EFF, during a speech given at Stellenbosch University on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2015. He said, “The struggle of our people represented the simplest thing. We want to live like white people. And that was a genuine demand. Because white people have houses. White people have electricity and water. They have rides. We didn’t say we want 1994 so that white people can go. That was never our struggle. Our struggle has always been that we want to live like white people and live with them”.

Rather than pointing out that ‘whiteness’ as a construct is oppressive and demeaning to black identity, Malema’s comments suggest a capitulation to notions of white dominance and a desire to attain some kind of parity with what he perceives to be the economic markers of white identity. This reflects elements of the discourses about identity discussed earlier in this chapter, particularly the observation by Elias (1994) that unequal power dynamics leads to members of weaker groups using the social standards of the stronger groups to measure their personal and collective self-worth.

This idea of freedom as economic consumption or freedom as affluence represents a shift from earlier freedom discourse within liberation movements in South Africa. Mngxitama (2000) argues that, unlike the Zimbabwean liberation struggle that was essentially about the land, the South African struggle focused on issues freedom as equality. In that sense it was a political struggle before it was an economic struggle, and the economic benefits of equality were almost an assumed corollary to political freedom. The discourse is shifting towards a focus on economic freedom, and this is benchmarked against white affluence.

In a context of economic stagnation and widening inequality the impossible aspirations of

the masses of poor South Africans to attain a middle class lifestyle is gaining momentum. As Posel (2010:159) writes, “Among many of those less well endowed, the aspiration to wealth, along with the acquisition and display of desirable things - from clothes and cell phones through to cars and houses - is boldly declared, and invested with the iconography of a joyous emancipation”.

There is a contradiction between the Marxism and Socialism of the liberation movements, and the way that these are reflected in documents like the Freedom Charter, and the ubiquitous corruption in government or the enrichment of a relatively small, politically connected elite through Black Economic Empowerment.

This has resulted in what Khan describes as a “new racial nationalism” in which indifference towards poverty and inequality and racially divisive, group based politics are held together by an emerging authoritarianism that is seen in increased police violence, the suppression of the media, and interference in judicial processes. The interests and enrichment of the political elite dominate at the expense of the poor, unemployed and marginalised. Grants are a palliative measure that serves the interests of this elite and its neo-liberal economic agenda. Structural changes and a reform of capitalism are needed to overcome the widening gap between the wealthy and the poor (Khan 2013).

This understanding of freedom, and frustration because of its continued absence, was omnipresent in conversations with co-researchers about the presence of foreigners in their communities. There was widespread assent that the presence of foreigners would not be a problem if all South Africans experienced freedom – in fact they would be welcome to share it with South Africans. It was the experience of non-freedom, of perpetual and hopeless poverty, that rendered foreigners a threat.

### **5.10 Reflecting on the xenophobia stories**

The narratives described in this chapter are present in explanations for the violence against foreigners, both by from co-researchers and in literature. There is disagreement over whether they adequately explain the violence.

### **5.10.1 Structural issues?**

Various analysts have attributed the violence to structural issues. Everatt is typical of these in attributing the violence to a number of factors:

...deep structural social, economic and spatial inequalities; an ongoing reliance on cheap labour; housing shortages; township retail competition; racism; a history of the use of violence to advance sectional interests; and a scarred national psyche were important contributing factors to the xenophobic outburst (Everatt 2011:10).

Misago et al (2010) argue that the violence against foreign nationals in May 2008 was not triggered by adverse economic conditions, a tsunami of immigrants, competition for resources, or by a lack of service delivery. These factors may have played a role in increasing tensions between citizens and foreign migrants, but they fail to explain why violence occurred in certain informal settlements and townships, and not others.

Explanations that focus on relative deprivation and the disappointment created by unmet expectations fail in their inability to explain the choice of the scapegoats or why the violence only occurs in certain communities. Why are African foreign nationals the scapegoats? Monson (2015) offers an insightful explanation of the politics behind the violence. Struggle, often involving violent protest, has long been a part of life in South Africa's most poverty stricken communities. Foreigners live in these communities, but are not involved in struggle politics. Monson (2015:147) writes, "A solidarity born of politicized suffering polarizes the committed and the uncommitted. There is a politics of proximity intrinsic to the collective experience of suffering and resisting together, which increases social distance from non-participants". This insight is helpful, but the focus on proximity fails to account for parallel discourses of blame that construct white South Africans as foreigners who do not belong.

### **5.10.2 Afrophobia?**

Is the violence against foreigners nothing more than an externalisation of self-hatred? A strength of this explanation is that it arises from the specific context and takes the historical realities of the context seriously. However, it does not explain the economically driven targets of many of the attacks. Why are foreign traders and shop owners the group of foreigners who are targeted most often? It must be acknowledged that the violence may escalate to a point where it escalates and becomes indiscriminate, and even South

Africans have been attacked when this occurs (Misago et al 2009:2). But the violence, and the language offered to explain the violence reflect economic and political motives more than they do identity issues.

Crush (2008:8) argues that the rise of xenophobia in the 1990's is linked to South Africa's past of "racial and class division and animosity, racist immigration policies, a siege mentality and attitudes of uniqueness and superiority towards the rest of Africa". He continues (2008:9):

Xenophobia, Afrophobia or negrophobia are overwhelmingly symptoms of a deeper malaise, the hang-over of dispossession, violence racism, intolerance, and the use of force to settle disputes. This has been 'the South African way' for centuries, and has bequeathed to those living in the present a deeply scarred national psyche. Without genuine, deep-seated healing – which is coupled to genuine redistribution and the reduction of inequality –no progress is conceivable. Xenophobia is a reflection of the deeper damage done to us.

Crush's analysis, which offers a more nuanced account of historical factors in shaping the South African social context, is preferred to the narrower explanation of Afrophobia or negrophobia. In attempting to attribute the violence to a single factor, these tend towards reductionism and fail to account for the specific nature of the violence and the explanations given by those who perpetrate it.

### **5.10.3 The role of leaders?**

A number of researchers (see Everatt 2010; Misago 2012; Crush et al 2013) have shown how political and business leaders have actively fomented xenophobic violence in communities where it has occurred, using it to strengthen their political influence or eliminate rival businesses.

Misago et al (2010) argue that leadership played a key role in the violence against foreigners. They identify a number of factors that led to xenophobic attitudes resulting in violence. These include:

- self-serving, parallel leadership structures that emerged in prevailing leadership vacuums;
- the prevalence of vigilantism and mob justice caused by the absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms;
- a culture of impunity with regard to public violence in general; and
- xenophobic attitudes and practices by institutions of the state.

The role played by leaders at multiple levels in society appears to be significant as an explanation for the violence against foreigners. How leadership is to be understood and the nature of its role in fomenting violence against foreigners will be explored in later chapters.

#### **5.10.4 Empirical evidence**

Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti (2012) conducted a study that explored the relationship between the violence in municipal wards that experienced xenophobic attacks and five variables:

- the demographic profile (gender, “race” and ethnic group);
- socio-economic issues such as education, employment and income;
- the relative number of foreigners living in the ward;
- the possibility of a contagion effect, in which attacks were imitated and multiplied; and
- political activity in that ward, particularly voting patterns before and after the violence.

One of their more startling conclusions was that “The empirical analysis shows clearly that there is no relationship between the occurrence of violence and the percentage of foreigners” and that this, “... suggests that foreigners, while being the target of violence, are not its cause.” (Fauvelle-Aymar & Segatti 2012:75).

Violence in 2008 was significantly higher in wards where there was:

- a higher proportion of people living in informal dwellings or shacks;
- income inequality, particularly between the poorest people and those with an intermediary income;
- heterogeneity in terms of language and income (but not country of origin);
- a disproportionate number of men; and
- less participation by residents in the 2006 election than in previous elections.

They did not find any significant correlation between the incidence of violence and:

- the proportion of unemployed persons;
- the proportion of youth;
- the level of education; or

- the proportion of foreigners, in particularly Zimbabweans.

A weakness of their study is that the census data used to measure the number of foreigners was over ten years old and did not include figures for undocumented foreign migrants.

However, their analysis found a correlation between a certain level of income, a certain type of housing and the occurrence of violence, which suggests that relative deprivation theory may explain some aspects of the violence. The correlation between levels of inequality/income and heterogeneity in terms of language is also in line with dominant theories of ethnic/national conflicts (Putnam 2007). This empirical research points to violence against foreigners arising from a confluence of factors structural and contextual factors.

## **5.11 Alternative discourses**

Two co-researchers presented a faith Discourse that shaped the way they perceived foreigners. This indicates the potential for alternative discourses to shape different meanings in relation to foreigners living in South Africa. I also explored *ubuntu* discourse with my co-researchers, motivated by curiosity about possibilities it might offer for challenging meanings that were evident in discourse about foreigners.

### **5.11.1 Faith discourses**

*“Jesus was once a refugee. We were giving to God – a vital part of our ministry. Other countries hosted South Africans during apartheid”* (Reverend Moloji, Randburg Methodist Church, describing the church’s response to foreign migrants in May 2008; quoted in Phakathi 2010:12)

Significant humanitarian aid was provided by faith based organisations during the 2008 violence against foreigners (Phakathi 2010). Integration of foreigners into community and faith based organisations is also proposed as part of the solution to xenophobia (Everatt 2010).

Three co-researchers self-identified as Christians, and what was significant about this was the way this explicitly shaped their views of foreigners. For Thandi, being a Christian meant that she had to treat all people equally, and as human beings. Leaders

in her churches encouraged her to build relationships across racial and ethnic divides. Hlonelwa had a vibrant faith, and a positive view of the church that had not been diminished by experiences of insensitivity and discrimination from fellow Christians who were white. Busisiwe also had a more positive view of foreigners, although she did feel that they caused problems in communities.

For some co-researchers, talk of churches and violence against foreigners in the same sentence evoked anger and disappointment. Why were they never the beneficiaries of such concern and generosity? Phakathi (2010:22) wrote, “The magnitude of the churches’ response indicates the ability of faith based and civil society organisations to address the challenges of the poor and vulnerable”. The response of churches to the violence against foreigners was commendable. However, comments from some co-researchers, years after the 2008 violence, still reflect pain that the predominantly white church congregations who responded to the needs of foreign migrants do not seem to notice the needs of black South Africans. The violence against foreigners seemed to highlight an indifference to ‘local’ suffering among more affluent South Africans.

Most of the co-researchers did not think God or the church was relevant to the issue of foreigners in their communities. For them, the church seemed to be part of the problem.

First, they described a situation where nearly all of the churches in their communities reflect strong divisions along ethnic lines. Among others, there were churches for Xhosas, churches for Zimbabweans, churches for Afrikaners, and churches for Congolese nationals. Siphon thought that “people felt more comfortable with their own kind”. It was interesting that their description of taverns and *shebeens* reflected a greater tolerance for diversity than was found in local churches. For example, although two taverns in Bedford were owned by Zimbabweans all of the co-researchers from that community said that they and their friends frequented these places. The local churches represented divisions more explicitly than other social institutions.

There was also a reticence concerning the Christian faith. It was regarded by some co-researchers as a “white man’s religion” that had played a significant role in the dispossession and poverty of black South Africans. Mothoagae (2011) shows the complicity of the church in the construction of discourses that have damaged cultural

identities. An erosion of identity has taken place over decades and centuries. It has been achieved through violence and material dispossession, through government policies and their enforcement, through words and labels that devalue the “other”, and through a construction of a “God” that, as Mothoagae (2011:6-7) points out, sanctioned both the dispossession and the notion of superiority or chosenness.

The views of some co-researchers reflects the argument raised by Mothoagae (2011:5), that, during colonialism, the Christian religion was used as a means to constructing an identity for black people in terms of which they were seen and made to see themselves as uncivilised, and their traditional practices as inferior. The credibility of both the church and the Gospel has been seriously eroded by its complicity in South Africa's oppressive past.

The proclamation of a gospel that became embedded in discourses of racial superiority and inferiority presents a problem for the hearers. Acceptance of the truth that will set them free and save them is inextricably linked with a “truth” that they are inferior. In order to be saved they must simultaneously be damned.

I asked Luvuyo whether he went to church.

Luvuyo: *No, I'm not. Not at all now. On that time I was growing up I was going to church*

JE: Why did you stop going?

Luvuyo: *I don't know John...I don't know if that stuff if it can help me.*

JE: So you're not sure if the church can help?

Luvuyo: *Not now. Maybe it can, but I can't say.*

JE: And the churches, do people from different groups, like Zimbabweans and South Africans, go to the same church?

Luvuyo: *No, they didn't go to the same church, we have those different churches*

JE: So in churches it's separate too.

Luvuyo: *Yes, even the church too*

JE: And what do you think God thinks about that?

Luvuyo: (*Laughs and shakes his head*)...no, God is not even happy about that thing; he's not happy, but we just do it.

#### 5.11.1.1 Reflections on faith discourses

The perception by most co-researchers that Christianity was irrelevant to their lives, and that it was therefore unable to influence their relationship with foreigners was a source of concern to me. Equally concerning was the manner in which faith communities reflected prevailing divisions in society rather than challenging them.

From the perspective of my positioning in practical theology it is tragic that articulations of the Christian message and faith in these communities suggest that it is either not interested in challenging structural injustices and the social problems that arise from these, or that it is unable to do this. It is my contention that, within the broader sphere of problems that it is able to address, theology is able to offer solutions for problems such as those that are apparent in the relationships between South Africans and the foreigners living among them.

#### 5.11.2 *Ubuntu* discourse

At the start of this research I was curious about the social value of *ubuntu*, and wanted to explore how it intersected with the antipathy and violence towards other human beings that was evident in our society. This curiosity was precipitated by media articles that suggested a link between *ubuntu*, or its absence, and what was termed xenophobia. The attacks on foreigners were described as a lack of *ubuntu* (Modise 2008; Ritchie 2008) and *ubuntu* was presented as something that was an alternative to the violent treatment of foreigners and a solution that would make peaceful coexistence between different groups possible (Chikane 2008; Msomi 2008; Nakhjavani & Smythe 2008). This theme, that *ubuntu* is a/the solution to xenophobia, has been repeated when violence against foreigners has erupted in subsequent years (Luswazi 2009; George 2010; Ahmed 2011). The link between xenophobia and *ubuntu* was revised again at the time of writing, during the attacks on foreigners in April 2015 (Allison 2015; Ebrahim 2015; Kuzwayo 2015).

The silence of co-researchers on *ubuntu* as something relevant to the way that foreigners are treated in South Africa made me curious about the power of *ubuntu* as a social value in South Africa. Could it be part of a solution to the problem of violence against foreigners? One could reflect on the murder rate in South Africa, the incidence

of rape and child rape, violent acts of xenophobia, corruption and nepotism, and legitimately question the existence of *ubuntu* or its power as a social value.

Empirical research into the state of *ubuntu* discourse in South Africa indicates that while core elements remain, the meaning of *ubuntu* has been eroded, and is subject to distortion and even abuse (Eliastam 2015).

Tutu (2011:172) asks some pointed questions about a lack of reverence for life in communities that should be characterised by *ubuntu*. How can children dance around the burning corpse of someone who has been “necklaced”? Why is the environment treated so badly, with so much littering and dumping in these communities? He (2011:172) writes, “It seems to me that we in the black community have lost our *ubuntu* - our humaneness, caring, hospitality, our sense of connectedness, our sense that my humanity is bound up in your humanity”.

Is *ubuntu* able to shape social relationships in South Africa, particularly those between South Africans and foreigners?

#### 5.11.2.1 What is *ubuntu*?

Tutu (1999:34-35) explains that the meaning of *ubuntu* is that, “a person is a person through other people’. It is not ‘I think therefore I am’. It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong’. I participate, I share”. The notion of *ubuntu* highlights the interconnectedness of human society, with the implication that people should treat others as part of the extended human family (Gish 2004:122).

The principles of *ubuntu* resonate with universal values of human worth and dignity. *Ubuntu* has been translated as “humanity” (Shutte 2001:2), “African humanness” (Broodryk 2002:13), “humanism or humaneness” (Mnyaka & Motlhabi 2009:63), or “the process of becoming an ethical human being” (Mkhize 2008:35).

Prinsloo (1998: 41-45) describes various understandings of *ubuntu* in the South African context. Chikanda (1990) sees *ubuntu* as African humanism. It involves sensitivity to the needs of others, charity, sympathy, care, respect, consideration and kindness. For Khoza (1994), *ubuntu* is an African view of life and the world in which people share and treat each other as humans, based on an underlying “universal brotherhood” of Africans.

In Mkhize's (2008:43) understanding, *ubuntu*, “incorporates ideas of social justice, righteousness, care, empathy for others and respect”. Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2009:74) write that *ubuntu*, “is inclusive ... it is best realised in deeds of kindness, compassion, caring, sharing, solidarity and sacrifice”. Makhudu (1993:40) writes that, “every facet of African life is shaped to embrace *ubuntu* as a process and philosophy which reflects the African heritage, traditions, culture, customs, beliefs, value system and the extended family structures”.

Mcunu (2004:25) presents *ubuntu* as the ideal stage of being a human being; it is the “best way of being a person according to African understanding of the human person”.

Louw points out that while these translations involve a loss of culture-specific meaning,

The maxim ‘*ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ articulates a basic respect and compassion for others.... As such, it is both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic. It not only describes human being as ‘being-with-others’, but also prescribes how we should relate to others, i.e. what ‘being-with-others’ should be all about (Louw 2001:15).

For Gathogo (2008:46) *ubuntu* “can be interpreted as both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic. It both describes human beings as ‘being-with-others’ and prescribes what ‘being-with-others’ should be all about”. Cornell and Van Marle (2005:207) capture this when they describe *ubuntu* as “an ontic orientation within an interactive ethic”.

I am particularly interested in Tutu's work on *ubuntu* because he has articulated a Christian theology that derives much of its force from his view of *ubuntu*. Tutu described *ubuntu* in The Star newspaper in 1981:

It referred to what ultimately distinguished us from the animals - the quality of being human and also humane. The definition is almost a tautology. The person who had *ubuntu* was known to be compassionate and gentle, who used his strength on behalf of the weak, who did not take advantage of others - in short he cared, treating others as what they were, human beings... (cited in Allen 2006:347).

The concept highlights the interconnectedness of human society, with the implication that people should treat others as part of the extended human family. Tutu (2011:21-24) further articulates his understanding of *ubuntu* in *God is Not a Christian*. He argues that because none of us enters the world fully formed, we need other human beings in order to become fully human. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms. He (2011:22) writes, “*ubuntu* is the essence of being human. It speaks of how my humanity is bound up in

yours. It says, not as Descartes did, 'I think therefore I am' but rather, 'I am because I belong'. ...I can be me only if you can be fully you. ...We are created for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence with our fellow human beings, with the rest of creation".

Tutu then lists the spiritual attributes of *ubuntu*, attributes such as generosity, compassion, hospitality, caring, and sharing. People with *ubuntu* are compassionate and gentle; they do not take advantage of others and use their strength for the benefit of the weak. In traditional African society, no matter how successful or wealthy a person might become, without *ubuntu* they would be viewed with pity and contempt. If someone lacked *ubuntu* they lacked something essential to being fully human. Tutu (1999:35) argues this sense of shared humanity means that a person's humanity is diminished when others are humiliated or oppressed.

#### 5.11.2.2 *Ubuntu in post-apartheid South Africa*

The birth of a democratic South Africa in 1994 created hope for healing and transformation in South Africa. The leadership of Nelson Mandela was an example and an inspiration that gave impetus towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Desmond Tutu spoke of a "Rainbow Nation", a phrase that encapsulated a vision for the future of South Africa that was full of possibility and hope. The notion of *ubuntu* has been central to attempts to build a transformed, just society.

Given the historical meaning and significance of *ubuntu* it is hardly surprising that the notion has strong appeal within a post-apartheid South African context. The Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1993) spoke of the need for *ubuntu* rather than retribution. The Batho Pele (people first) principles that promote service delivery in the public sector are based on *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* was the foundation of the Moral Regeneration Movement that was launched in South Africa in 2002 (Matolino & Kwindingwi 2013:200). *Ubuntu* has been harnessed in many ways: as a constitutional value that can be operationalised in law (Mokgoro 1998; Bekker 2006); as a philosophical basis for constitutional democracy (De Gruchy 2011); as foundation for moral theory (Shutte 1993; Metz 2007); as the basis for public policy (Nkondo 2007); as a guiding principle for citizenship education (Letseka 2012); as a normative value for education (Higgs 2003 ; Venter 2004); as the basis for business ethics (Lutz 2009; West 2014); as a model for management (Mbigi 1992; Van den Heuwel, Mangaliso & Van den Bunt (eds) 2007); as the basis for an African approach to conflict resolution and

peace building (Murithi 2006); as a theological motif (Tutu 1999); and as the framework for a theology of relational ontology (Forster 2010). This list is by no means exhaustive, but it is indicative of the wide scope of application that is proposed by the advocates of *ubuntu*. Shutte (2001) and Broodryk (2002) have argued that *ubuntu* should be exported to the rest of the world as Africa's unique gift to humanity.

### 5.11.2.3 *Ubuntu: contradictions and questions*

Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) are suspicious of some of the claims and principles associated with *ubuntu*. There are questions about whether it can include other cultures. They use the word “specieist” to criticise *ubuntu*'s focus on human beings. They argue that *ubuntu* is contradicted, or weakened by the prevalence in Africa of autocratic rule, corruption, sexism, homophobia and the degradation of the environment. Furthermore, they question the value of *ubuntu* as a practical guide for policies or actions, arguing that it does not offer practical guidance for issues such as wasteful public expenditure or HIV/AIDS education. They conclude that *ubuntu* does not offer a solution as a foundation for a uniquely African form of democracy and question its value in citizenship education.

Cornell and Van Marle (2005:196) mention various criticisms that have been levelled against *ubuntu*. These acknowledge the meaning it once had as a social value, but question its relevance today, especially to young South Africans. It is argued by some that *ubuntu* is inherently patriarchal and conservative. Its usefulness as a guiding principle for South African society is also diminished by its vagueness and ability to accommodate a range of meanings.

Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013:197) criticise what they call the “aggressive promotion of *ubuntu*” in post-apartheid South Africa. They argue that history has shown that the use of such narratives of return to promote black identity has always resulted in failure. What it means to be “African” is homogenised and alternative interpretations are suppressed as a hegemony is created around an ideal African way of being. They point to the massive disconnect between the ideals of *ubuntu* and the lived reality of most South Africans.

Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013:200-201) observe that through misappropriation and overuse, “the notion of *ubuntu* has enjoyed such popular appeal that it can be said that it

has become anything to anyone who so wishes to deploy it". It is an outdated notion and there are greater dangers associated with its attempted revival than there are benefits. They conclude that *ubuntu* does not have the capacity to shape ethics in the current South African context. For the authors, attempting to return to the old is dangerous because of the elitist political agendas behind this, and faulty because what worked in Africa then is not suitable for a now that has been shaped by urbanisation and modernity. While there is no fault with the ideal of *ubuntu* itself, it is not suited to the social and ethical challenges of our current situation.

#### *5.11.2.4 Ubuntu and the amakwerekwere*

What was interesting was that none of the co-researchers said anything about *ubuntu*, which seemed to indicate that they did not immediately see it as something that was relevant to the way foreigners were being treated by local South Africans. I had to introduce the notion of *ubuntu*. When I did this there were various descriptions of it from co-researchers.

All of those I spoke to defined *ubuntu* in familiar terms: hospitality, compassion, humaneness, sharing, and respect.

*Unathi: Ubuntu is about treating people with respect, it's about courtesy and compassion.*

*Thandi: Ubuntu means we care for people and we share what we have with them because we have a shared humanity.*

I asked co-researchers if they thought that *ubuntu* was still a strong force in their communities.

*Bongani: This thing of ubuntu is difficult when you are poor. How can I share with foreigners if I have nothing?*

*Busisiwe: Poverty is killing ubuntu, because people they don't care about another human being. They will rob and kill just to get something for themselves.*

I was curious about whether a foreigner would be treated with *ubuntu*, and asked if a Zimbabwean living in South Africa would be shown *ubuntu*. The replies varied. Three co-researchers felt that foreigners should be treated with *ubuntu* and one felt that this

did happen in practice. Luvuyo believed that foreigners should be treated with *ubuntu*, but that this was very unlikely to happen in his community.

Luvuyo: *Everybody can experience ubuntu. If you are a human being I must treat you with ubuntu. But this thing is not happening in our community. I think maybe it will not happen.*

Thandi: *I feel naked, disappointed and ashamed to be part of a community that has no ubuntu towards fellow brothers and sisters. Yet Africa and the rest of the world offered support to South Africans during our time of need.*

Hlonelwa: *Yes, you will see that even a taxi driver will sometimes let that foreigner ...maybe he has only five Rand and the fare is eight Rand, but he can still come on that taxi because that is ubuntu.*

The majority of responses from co-researchers were less positive, and some indicated that foreigners were outside the scope of *ubuntu*.

Unathi: *Ubuntu should work both ways. We are being taken advantage of as South Africans. They are abusing our hospitality.*

Liso: *No, he is stealing our opportunities. He must go back to Zimbabwe. This ubuntu thing...eish... we can't suffer in our country while foreigners are sucking our country dry.*

Andile: *No, it isn't. It is for our people.*

I asked what was meant by "our people".

Andile laughs: *You must know what I mean (pause) it's the people in our community. White people do not understand ubuntu, they do not want ubuntu. Even we show them ubuntu in 1994 but they cannot show it.*

Odwa: *Ubuntu is among abantu<sup>9</sup>. Somalis and Pakistanis are not abantu.*

Sipho offers a different perspective on *ubuntu*.

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<sup>9</sup> People.

Sipho: *This is ubuntu, doing something together and preventing theft of our economy. Where is the gogo<sup>10</sup> who sold spinach in the corner or the mama who sold mealies outside the school? They are at home hungry because of these shops.*

I asked him to help me understand why he understood *ubuntu* in this way. He explained that their ancestors were angry because they had allowed their land to be stolen by white people. The land was very important to the ancestors. When they acted to protect the land they were honouring the ancestors. This was part of *ubuntu* because people were not only connected with those who are alive, but also with the spirits of the ancestors.

The meanings of *ubuntu* expressed by co-researchers in relation to foreigners were both interesting and surprising. Has *ubuntu* lost its ability to shape social interactions in South Africa? Tutu's reflections on the absence of *ubuntu* in certain African contexts are worth noting:

Where was *ubuntu* in the Belgian Congo in the early 1960's? Why did the Rwandans forget *ubuntu* in 1994 and instead destroy one another in the most awful genocide...? I don't really know except to say that honoring *ubuntu* is clearly not a mechanical, automatic and inevitable process... (Tutu 1999:36).

## 5.12 Discursive intersections

As I reflected on these stories that cumulatively shape the reality of the co-researchers in this study, it seemed that the points of intersections between the discourses were important. I met with co-researchers in two group sessions and discussed this with them. They felt that the issues not only intersected, but when combined, the cumulative force of the separate issues became greater. The narratives fed and strengthened each other. The section that follows will highlight some of the intersections between the various discourses.

### 5.12.1 *Ubuntu*, displacement and poverty

The way that *ubuntu* discourse has been harnessed in post-apartheid South Africa reflects a desire to find something uniquely African upon which to build. This is not unique in post-colonial or post-conflict African societies. As part of the process of emerging from colonial rule and transforming their societies, African countries have tried

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<sup>10</sup> Colloquial term for a grandmother or old woman.

to return to something from their past that is deemed to be worthy. Gade (2011:304-305) observes that these narratives of return tend to divide history into three phases: the pre-colonial age which is often conceived of as a time of near perfect harmony and prosperity; a second phase in which outsiders steal the resources, dignity and culture of African people; and a third phase of recovery in which African dignity and culture is restored. *Ubuntu* discourses in South Africa fit into this broader category of narratives of return (Gade 2011; Matolino & Kwindigwi 2013).

In the *ubuntu* version of this narrative, *ubuntu* is perceived to be an attractive notion for African people because it embodies desirable elements of an African cultural identity. This “official” use of *ubuntu* discourse was at odds with sentiments expressed by some co-researchers in which they saw *ubuntu* as something which had led to loss.

Bongani: *This thing of ubuntu has left us with nothing. Today we have no land.*

Sipho: *We have treated you white people with ubuntu. You have given us nothing in return. This ubuntu (pause) we do not need this thing anymore.*

Here, *ubuntu* is not seen as something positive to return to, but rather a flaw that made Africans vulnerable to exploitation. It was, perhaps, a naïve chink in their armour that was exposed by the ruthless acquisitiveness of European settlers. The way that Bongani said this seemed to reflect a dual pain, pain at the loss of land and pain because what had seemed to be a strength in his culture had been the cause of the loss.

Embracing the ideals of *ubuntu* seems impossible without first addressing the structural issues related to dispossession and marginalisation. The massive impact of systemic poverty may have eroded the power of *ubuntu* to shape social interactions.

### **5.12.2 Poverty, identity and *ubuntu***

Tutu (2011) discusses the negative connotations associated with being black, and how this results in a denigration of black people. He (2011:116) writes, “When this happens for long enough, it is not long before you, a black person, wonder whether you are not as they depict you. You begin, deep down to have doubts about your own humanity”.

The writing of Fanon (1986) reveals two processes that are at work in racial oppression. The first is social and economic, the second is psychological. Economic dispossession is

justified on the grounds of racial superiority and inferiority, and that inferiority is then internalised by the dispossessed. Fanon writes (1986:112), "...the white man has woven me out of a thousand details...I was battered down with tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects..."

The oppressed and dispossessed black person lives with the economic impact of dispossession of land and resources, but also with the result of a dispossession of identity and its displacement with an identity that white people have constructed. Clarke (2008:524) points out that a stereotype of the black person is constructed in the mind of the white person and then forced back onto the black person.

A lack of *ubuntu* in relation to foreign migrants may be linked to the devaluing of black identity, particularly black South African identity. Also, the relative approval by white South Africans of black people from other parts of Africa, compared with sentiments shown towards black South Africans, may create resentment and animosity that impedes the treatment of foreigners with *ubuntu*.

### **5.12.3 Poverty, consumption and rights**

Cooper made some interesting observations, based on a study of violence against foreigners in Dunoon in the Western Cape:

People may well be hungry, but hunger usually turns to violence when a set of beliefs and ideologies exist, in addition to this hunger, which indicate that a situation is unfair and that taking action to bring about change, is justified. Through the combination of identities portrayed by young people in this study - as black, Xhosa and modern citizens - it appears as if the discursive justification for the violence- as due to 'hunger'- was being used partially metaphorically, to describe a set of desires: people in Dunoon want food, but they are also hungry for televisions, laptop computers and airtime for their cellphones. Many of these commodities, which are integral to a modern, middle-class lifestyle, are still largely elusive for groups of the South African urban poor. This leads to resentment and frustration and may produce violence when others in the local environment, such as Somali shopkeepers, appear to enjoy these social and economic privileges, to a greater extent (Cooper 2009:1).

The intersection between narratives of extreme poverty, which describe the reality of millions of South Africans, and the discursive construction of freedom, discussed earlier and reflected in the aspirations of the young people in Cooper's study, seems to amplify the misery caused by poverty.

The entrenchment of socio economic rights in the constitution may become conflated with the notion of freedom as consumption. This could create a sense of moral indignation where any number of constraints makes the desired consumption impossible.

The economic conditions of the co-researchers create meaning about who they are. They seem to be constantly assessing what they have, relative to foreigners in their communities, and evaluating the fairness of this.

#### **5.12.4 *Ubuntu* and constructions of freedom**

The force of *ubuntu* may have been eroded by the encroachment of Western individualism and materialism on African culture. This was reflected in a statement made to me by a young woman in East London:

*Unathi: The new generation does not believe in Ubuntu ever since the greed for Western luxuries took over.*

It was interesting that this perspective came from a young person; it was a reflection on her own generation rather than a judgement made by an older generation. She admitted that she desired those luxuries and felt that *ubuntu* was good but “old fashioned” and that she was not sure if it “works” any longer.

When a certain kind of consumption becomes a marker for freedom, there is a disincentive for the sharing, communal spirit of *ubuntu*. In its place there seems to be increasing resentment towards those whose lifestyles reflect that kind of consumption. It is significant that the issues that Banda and Mawedza (2015) highlight as being the source of media-induced moral panic over the presence of foreign migrants, are precisely the issues that are evoked by discourses of freedom.

Freedom is upward economic mobility. Freedom is houses and service delivery. Freedom is the ability to consume. Foreigners seem to be attaining this freedom that still lies beyond the reach of South Africans after twenty years of democracy.

#### **5.12.5 Rights, protest and belonging**

There is an obvious intersection between rights discourse and service delivery protests. Monson (2015) identifies an intersection between these discourses and a discourse of

belonging. She explores the importance of protest mobilisation in trajectories leading to violence against foreigners. She refers to Geschiere's study of autochthony, and in particular the argument that the power of autochthony is derived from "a concentrating force" that produces "a shared sensorial experience of the world" and that this is what unites diverse people and gives them a sense of "authentic belonging" (Geschiere 2009:34-35).

Monson (2015:147) argues that the technology of demonstration may function as a concentration force, "as it creates a dynamic embodiment of the local political community – a performative process in which heterogeneous groups are united in their commitment to political action". Monson points out that the protests are not only a shared reaction to the challenges of life in these communities, they reflect an historical experience of shared suffering and shared struggle. She writes, "protest mobilization relies on similar repertoires and evokes the insurgent subjectivity of the 'struggle' years, with the same coercive strategies to build solidarity, the same iconography of revolt (such as burning tyres), and the same tradition of singing revolutionary songs".

She notes that foreign migrants in communities where this kind of protest takes place are not able to vote and do not get involved in the political life of the communities in which they live. They have no direct stake in the local struggles that escalate into violent protest and as a result do not usually get involved in these protests. The exigencies of subsistence strategies of economic survival lead to situations where foreigners are often trading while South African community members are protesting. This creates a perception of indifference to the suffering of residents in the community, accompanied by a motive of financial gain. While there is the perception that foreigners are simply soft targets for violence, Monson (2015:147) discerns another level underlying the violence, "a solidarity born of politicized suffering polarizes the committed and the uncommitted". The experience of suffering together and engaging in protest together creates a bond of community and belonging. Non-participation of foreign migrants in this corporate suffering and struggle results in increased social distance between them and local residents.

#### **5.12.6 Freedom, rights and belonging**

Where citizenship is understood as autochthony and freedom as consumption, the enjoyment of economic prosperity by foreigners will be viewed as illegitimate. It is

therefore not surprising that so much of the violence against foreigners is directed against shopkeepers and traders who have high levels of visibility in the community. The prosperity, and perhaps even the existence, of these entrepreneurs violates the autochthonous understanding of the nation. Similarly, their ability to buy and own things that are out of the economic reach of locals is regarded as an encroachment on the rights of South Africans.

Crush (ed) (2008) found that, excluding treatment for HIV/AIDS, 66% of South Africans felt that irregular migrants should not be given any rights or protection, and this applied particularly to the right to basic services.

### **5.12.7 Difference, *ubuntu*, and belonging**

Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013:204) point out that, “some of the most dedicated adherents of *ubuntu* would not be comfortable with some of the rights that are defended by the bill of rights/the constitution”. *Ubuntu* does not make all people equal. The cultural system that is said to be an expression of *ubuntu* relegates women to a lower social status. This is seen particularly in the regulation of customary marriage, access to land, and inheritance rights. *Ubuntu* seems to exclude certain groups from the scope of its benefits.

This raises the question of the extent of *ubuntu*. How wide do its boundaries stretch? Gathogo captures the dilemma:

Primarily, *ubuntu* expresses itself well in the provision of assistance to ‘our people’ who may mean - the members of the blood relatives, tribesmates, clanmates, political camp mates, social camp mates, and so forth. This has its obvious dangers in that the criterion in determining who is ‘Our person’ and ‘who is not one of us’ is indeed a tricky one (Gathogo 2008:47).

Naude (2013:246) argues that when *ubuntu* is interpreted in a narrow or ethnic fashion it becomes corrupted. It is reduced to the use of one's power to benefit those close to you. “We” is limited to those in my family, tribe or political party and *ubuntu* becomes a system of patronage that is used to pursue power and money. Naude adds that there are signs that *ubuntu* has disappeared completely and traces this to factors such as the damage done by colonialism to African identity, cultural globalisation and the encroachment of modernity on traditional African culture. Naude describes the results of this in our society:

...the weak and the vulnerable fall by the wayside; the old sit alone; those dying of AIDS are socially shunned; foreigners – many of them desperate – are attacked; and tax money (the small proportion that does reach the state's coffers in many African countries) is spent on sport stadiums and airports for the rich and benefits for the ruling elite, instead of being invested in education and basic health care for the poor (Naude 2013:246).

The intersection of *ubuntu* discourse with a nativist discourse that constructs belonging in terms of autochthony leads to a boundary being created that limits the scope of *ubuntu* to the indigenous. People who are not indigenous do not belong, and may not be treated in the spirit of *ubuntu*. Indeed, to the extent that they are perceived to be enjoying levels of consumption or rights to the detriment of locals, they may well experience a reality that is far removed from the ideals of *ubuntu*.

The silence of co-researchers on *ubuntu* suggests its absence on social discourse regarding foreigners. I have argued elsewhere that the force and meaning of *ubuntu* has been eroded (Eliastam 2015). It cannot be taken for granted as a value that shapes social relations in the South African context. Is *ubuntu* still alive and visibly expressed in South African society? The answer seems to be an equivocal, “Yes and no”. It is alive and it is dead; it is seen and it is not seen. *Ubuntu* exists tightly interwoven with *un-ubuntu* (Eliastam 2015:7).

#### **5.12.8 Reflections of co-researchers on the intersections**

I met with the co-researchers to discuss these apparent intersections. I wanted to discover if their attempts to make sense of their experiences reflected the same interplay between the various narratives. All of them agreed that the issues were inextricably linked.

*Unathi: Of course these things all fit together. People don't even know where their next meal will come from, but they see people who have so much, and these are the people who took the land. They are trying to improve their lives, but even in their own communities they are losing out to foreigners. It makes them question who they are, even why they were born. And people have been waiting for a long time for things to change, but nothing has changed, so they take action themselves and express their frustration.*

Buntu: *If you are a black man you have been pushed aside, you don't know who you are. You have nothing; you are just waiting for the government, but the things they promise they do not come. You look at other people, even at these foreigners, and you see what they have. They take all these things that we should have. It makes people get angry. When there is anger and pain it is hard to find ubuntu.*

Hlonelwa: *When we speak about this it makes me realise how little has changed for black people since 1994. They are still not really free in their own country, and all of these things are linked: poverty, damaged identity, landlessness, the endless waiting for service delivery, and then they see people around them who have so much. I think it makes people resentful and angry.*

Co-researchers suggested that the answer to the problems they experienced was real freedom, which included economic freedom. In Odwa's words: *If people were really free we wouldn't be having any of these problems. We would have land, we would have houses, we would have jobs, we would have cars, and then these foreigners would not be a problem because there would be enough for everyone.*

## **5.13 Liminal spaces and transversal narrativity**

### **5.13.1 Liminal spaces and the construction of meaning**

The notion of liminality, introduced in chapter 1, is applicable to both the current state of *ubuntu* and to South African society. It has experienced rapid, discontinuous change. It is in an extended transition between the old and the new. To use Narrative language, it is 'in between stories'. Our narratives of culture and identity have to some extent been lost. We are in an unsettled, uncomfortable transitional space. Between narratives of *what was* and *what could be* we find ourselves in a *what is* that is full of contradictions and loss. The social context in which meaning is being constructed in relation to foreigners is a liminal space. It is unstable; it is simultaneously a place of loss and a place of possibility.

Similarly, Müller's (2011) use of the notion of an *ecotone*, a transition area between neighbouring but different communities of plants or animals, as a metaphor for Postfoundationalist Theology can be applied as a metaphor for the discursive landscape described in this chapter, which is characterised by the intersection and even contradiction

of many different stories. The “edge effect” of this discursive *ecotone* creates meanings that are the unique product of intersections.

What was interesting in the narratives of co-researchers was that the absence or presence of just one Discourse was sufficient to significantly change the meaning with regard to foreigners. Thandi did not see foreigners as fundamentally different from herself, with the result that neither their presence nor their economic activity represented threats. Luvuyo did not regard foreigners as outsiders who did not belong; as a result he viewed them as exemplary because of their industry and commitment to building better lives for themselves. Hlonelwa’s faith transformed her view of foreigners, despite the presence of many of the other Discourses on foreigners in her conversation with me.

In a similar way, with those co-researchers who were most vehemently opposed to foreigners and who supported their ejection from South Africa, all of the discourses described in this chapter were present. Discourses on identity, displacement, belonging, entitlement, comparison, and blame merged into frustration at the absence of the promised benefits of freedom, and this frustration was exploited by local leaders.

The theme that surfaced repeatedly at these intersections was that of freedom: freedom as the healing of identity; freedom as the recovery of land and a place in the world; freedom as the experience of belonging in their own land; freedom as access to economic opportunities; freedom as the escape from poverty into middle class affluence; freedom as the possibility for the full realisation of the echoes of *ubuntu* that have survived the brutal assault of racism on culture and identity.

### **5.13.2 Discursive intersections and transversal narrativity**

I want to propose the term ‘transversal narrativity’ to describe this creation of new meanings at the intersection of various narratives. When two words are combined, each modifies the meaning of the other. For example, the intersection of the words, ‘progressive’ and ‘Christian’ produces new meaning that is not simply a combination of the words, because through their combination both are modified. Since the meanings attributed to words are, relational, contextual, and are a product of difference rather than a product of identity (de Saussure 1998), meaning is inherently unstable and the combination of words can either reinforce or destabilise their meanings.

In the same way that the intersection of two signifiers produces new meanings, which modify meanings previously attached to either of words, the intersection of stories is a site in which new meanings are constructed. Borrowing the notion of transversality from Schrag (1992), I propose that it is in the transversal arrangement of stories that meanings emerge, and that new meaning emerges particularly at the multiple points where these narratives intersect. The points at which narratives overlap and intersect are able to both modify the meanings of the intersecting narratives and create new meanings that arise from a combination or even a conflation of stories. The absence of certain narratives will shape meaning, as will the introduction of certain narratives.

Van Huyssteen (1999:136) locates the claims of reason “in the overlaps of rationality between groups, discourse or reasoning strategies”. There is a similar production of meaning where stories overlap and intersect. I will return to this notion of transversal narrativity, and the possibilities it presents for addressing the violence against foreigners in South Africa in chapter 7.

#### **5.14 Concluding reflections**

This chapter has highlighted the various Discourses that are reflected in the narratives of co-researchers that construct what is described as xenophobia. I have noted that the manner in which the discourses intersect is significant for understanding this construction of meaning. The following chapter consists of a short interdisciplinary conversation with representatives from various disciplines, in which they reflect on an interview with one of the co-researchers. The interdisciplinary study is informed by the notion of transversal rationality proposed by Schrag and Van Huyssteen. This interdisciplinary conversation is expanded in chapter 7 and forms the basis for an alternative narrative to emerge to the dominant xenophobia narrative as an explanation for the violence against foreigners in South Africa.

## CHAPTER 6

### RE-STORYING XENOPHOBIA

#### PART ONE

#### TRANSVERSAL INTERDISCIPLINARY CONVERSATION

##### 6.1a Interdisciplinary conversation as a catalyst for insights

This study will engage in an interdisciplinary conversation that reflects the transversal rationality proposed by Schrag and van Huyssteen. In order to demonstrate the insights that such a conversation might contribute, I selected one interview, that with Hlonelwa and sent it to participants from various disciplines. I informed them of my aim to conduct an interdisciplinary conversation, based on a single interview, and that their responses would form part of my PhD dissertation. Hlonelwa had given her consent for the interview conducted with her to be the basis of such a conversation.

This conversation was an attempt to follow Müller's (2009) proposal for a transversal interdisciplinary dialogue. However, I found it challenging, and one of the more frustrating parts of this research. I initially invited four black South African academics and three white South African academics to participate. Two from each group agreed to participate. For various reasons, three of these people withdrew and I had to find alternative participants at fairly short notice in April 2015. I was extremely disappointed that the conversation only reflected white academic voices, and was tempted to exclude it. I included it because, even though it did not illuminate my research, it illustrates the different insights that can emerge from such dialogue. I selected participants from the disciplines of Political Science, Psychology, and Industrial Psychology. They are all active as either academics or practitioners in their fields. They are:

<b>Dr Cori Wielenga</b> Political Science	Post-Doctoral research fellow at the University of Pretoria	R 1
<b>Judy Rankin</b> Psychology	Psychologist in private practice, East London	R 2
<b>Prof. Robin Snelgar</b> Industrial and Organisational Psychology	HOD Department of Industrial & Organisational Psychology, NMMU	R 3

The participants were asked to answer four questions from the perspective of their discipline. I have used the questions developed by (Müller 2009:207).

1. When reading the story of Hlonelwa, what are your concerns?
2. What do you think is your discipline's unique perspective on this story?
3. Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by people from other disciplines?
4. What would your major concern be if the perspective of your discipline might not be taken seriously?

The responses of the participants to the four questions are recorded below. The responses have not been edited.

### **1. When reading the story of Hlonelwa, what are your concerns?**

#### **R1**

- What particularly stood out for me, and moved me, was Hlonelwa's feeling that things had changed in Mdantsane too quickly - she keeps using the work "shock" and "shocking" which are strong words to describe her experience. And then that she feels as if they're still the losers - they were displaced by Apartheid and now they're displaced by foreigners. That concerns me.

#### **R2**

- The interview I read has highlighted a personal sensitivity to the possible causes and grassroots justification for these attacks. The attacks are not viewed by individuals caught up in this as located in wider stories and the long term effects of the colonization, imperialism, racism and institutional mechanism of power and control. It becomes personalized on the ground and then manifests as an internalized pathology as well as a static view of culture. The respondent speaks of regarding the effects of the above on identity in terms of self value (it is noted that she is unemployed).
- I am concerned also how she makes sense of the difference between colonization and racism (and the system of apartheid). She mentions how under the apartheid government people were viewed as servants whereas under colonial rule people were treated differently and "given" skills etc., "countries people were given skills. And with apartheid the system hasn't given us enough to make you an industrious

person, you're always the servant". People were given skills? Only in the interest of the oppressors!

- The static nature of Culture as a fixed thing. No indication of the fluid nature of culture as new social constructions are developed over time.
- She locates the act of separation between people in the Apartheid system, the role of textbooks ("not just propaganda"... "books can do this"), historical divisions, and experience of competition and access to resources BUT does not engage with the more invisible mechanisms of power including modernism and capitalism.
- Interesting that whites are not targeted at all and seen as a uniform group (not made up of "cultures").

### R3

- My main concern is that there is very little personal insight and self-evaluation revealed by this person. The locus of control is completely external. The assumption seems to be that she and her culture are absolutely without blame and everyone else is – 'they' are the antagonists, and creators of all that is negative. The reason why this is of such concern is because xenophobia is not simply a matter of racism, but also killing and maiming in the most horrific fashion. Another reason is because without honest self-analysis there will be no basis for reconciliation. It does not occur to her that her attitudes reveal her own prejudice, stereotyping and racism. To simply blame apartheid for xenophobia is to take on the attitude that this is to blame for everything, without any critical analysis of the opinion or attitude. I note the term "denialism" in relation to White South Africans – this is very ironic, given the context of her own attitudes. The problem with this type of approach is that the future of the country is bleak because of the "we are right and they are wrong" attitude without any acknowledgement of responsibility for the existence of problems in South Africa.

#### **Reflection on concerns**

What strikes me first about the responses is the difference between the concerns raised by various participants. The contrast between the empathetic response of R1 and the critical response of R3 was most noticeable. It is interesting that the same narrative can evoke such different concerns. Perhaps the difficult circumstances that evoke the empathy of R1 could produce a sense of powerlessness that is described by R3 as an

external locus of control (Abramson et al 1978; Weyers 2011).

Both R2 and R3 note a depiction of white South Africans as a homogenous group.

R3 is concerned at the 'other', whether it is white South Africans or foreigners, being blamed for problems that exist without any critical reflection or sense of responsibility.

## 2. What is your discipline's unique perspective on this story?

### R1

- My discipline's unique perspective (which is a combination of Political Science and Peace Studies) would be to bring together the personal with the political, the individual within their broader context. For example, my thoughts immediately went to the policy level - what policies exist to regulate and facilitate the participation of foreigners in local communities, what role does local government play in mediating between these different groups of people, what Civil Society Organisations are working in this area and how do they negotiate between the local communities they serve and the local government and government policies, how aware are the different tiers of government (local, provincial, national) of the reality "on the ground" and how local communities experience these things, do existing policies aid or hinder the integration of foreigners into local communities, etc.

### R2

- I don't think that traditional/modernist psychology would offer much? Modernist thought can be traced throughout the foundations of the psychotherapeutic theories and modalities that have dominated the field from Freud to the present. Traditional psychology with an intra-psychic focus has little to offer. It is pathology based and does not incorporate a contextual base for analysis. A critical psychology with a post-modern/social constructionist perspective offers more. (Social psychology may offer useful understandings re "ingroup" and "outgroup" may be useful but I do not have knowledge of this.) In traditional psychological approaches including: cognitive behavioural, psychoanalytic, psycho dynamic would examine the factors (in response to this interview) which has contributed to poor self esteem, anxiety, depression, paranoia, WITHIN the dynamics of the individual!
- The Narrative approach which engages in the deconstruction of the relationship

between knowledge and power I believe is more useful. “A Narrative analysis of power encourages us to ask: Which stories define cultural norms? Where did these stories come from? Whose stories were ignored or erased to create these norms? And, most urgently, what new stories can we tell to help create the world we desire?” (White. Workshop notes Dulwich Centre website).

- In the same reference White tabulates the mechanisms of modern power, it “...employs a technology of power that is characterised by continuums of normality/abnormality, tables of performance, scales for the rating of human expression, formulae for the ranking of persons in relation to each other, and specific procedures of assessment and evaluation that makes possible the insertion of people’s lives into these continuums, tables, scales and ranking systems” (White).
- This seems very relevant to the ideas and experiences referred to in this interview: rivalry, cultural stereotypes and then ranking in terms of “better blacks”.
- A Marxist analysis would offer useful insight to the relationship to the “means of production”. Space...and access to resources, seems to fuel the stories which are created to mask the underlying issues within the context of poverty and employment etc.

### R3

- My discipline tends to focus on the understanding of human behaviour and psyche in the light of the political and cultural interface within the workplace. So, the unpacking and understanding of human psyche, behaviour and reactions given certain circumstances, in the light of the tremendous potential for conflict within the workplace in SA is of fundamental importance. This then leads to meaningful interventions in order to deal with these behaviours. Without this there would be no workable solutions to the attitudes, beliefs, values and conflict which exists and disrupts healthy working environments.

#### **Reflection on unique perspectives**

Each discipline offered unique insights:

**Political science:** the manner in which the life of the individual is shaped by political systems and structures.

**Psychology:** the inadequacy of modernist approaches that locate the problem within the individual as pathology, and the need to explore the stories that shape reality and deconstruct knowledge systems to expose the power relations inherent in them.

**Organisational Psychology:** the need for appropriate interventions and mechanisms for conflict resolution.

It is interesting that all three perspectives explored the interplay between the individual and the collective. Political systems regulate the expression of individual political demands, thus shaping the social context. In a similar manner, Industrial and Organisational psychology attempt to regulate conflict in the workplace through mechanisms that allow for the needs and demands of multiple parties to be considered. While modernist psychology tends to neglect context and the social in favour of the inner world of the individual, post-modern approaches, including narrative approaches, understand the individual as the product of the social.

### **3. Why do you think your perspective will be understood and appreciated by people from other disciplines?**

#### **R1**

- People from other disciplines might appreciate this perspective because the intersection between the personal and the political, the individual and the policies and regulations that shape their contexts are obviously important. It's on the policy or governance level that many meaningful changes can take place.

#### **R2**

- I don't think that modernist psychology really offers anything. However the postmodern approach is not limited to psychology...which I feel offers more insights. It is a philosophical critical reflection available to most disciplines?

#### **R3**

- As mentioned in question 2 above, without Industrial Psychology and Organisational Behaviour, the reactions to human behaviour in the workplace, and in society in general for that matter, would be based on guesswork. If there was ever to be a meaningful attempt at reconciliation, the foundation would have to be built on this discipline.

### **Reflection on being understood and appreciated by other disciplines**

Both political science and industrial/organisational psychology offer governance structures or various mechanisms as a means to bring about change or resolve conflicts within society. There is a level of agreement between these disciplines as to the broad nature of possible solutions, although each discipline would bring its own processes as possible solutions to the problem investigated in this study.

As is noted, the processes of critical reflection and enquiry that are offered by postmodern approaches to psychology are available to various disciplines and are not unique to Psychology.

### **4. What would your major concern be if the perspective of your discipline might not be taken seriously?**

#### **R1**

- I might be concerned that the discussion remains on the interpersonal level without those stories reaching decision and policy-makers who have the power to change things. It is through the cooperation of local communities, CSOs (including church communities, social clubs etc. etc.), local government and national policy that I believe change can happen. On the community level, communities working together can do amazing things to transform their contexts, but this can only go so far before being restricted by the policies and practices of government. Not only policies, but government or public discourse can also influence the way a community perceives their reality, as has been shown time and again by the discourse of someone like Nelson Mandela or Desmond Tutu. A strong supportive discourse around the positive integration of foreigners into local communities could have an important role to play.

#### **R2**

- As I listen to mainstream analysis of xenophobia attacks in the media at present I feel concerned as the explanations on the ground do not take a meta perspective on the grand narratives that are at play in terms of power and knowledge and the institutional mechanisms of control. The explanations mask the mechanisms of exploitation and oppression which emerge from a history of discrimination in Africa

be it colonialism, apartheid and associated racism. This includes the static stories of culture which separate and divide.

### R3

- If we concentrate on just one set of practices which fall within the context of this discipline, namely Labour Relations, then without the interventions which have evolved as a result of the decades of disciplinary application, this country would probably have erupted into civil unrest and anarchy. The focus on conflict resolution and collective bargaining has provided a meaningful platform upon which huge progress has been built in encouraging meaningful interaction instead of disruptive behaviour. The problem is to develop and evolve to the extent that when individual opinions are offered, they do not reflect a generalist mind-set without any critical-analysis.

#### **Reflections on concerns if the discipline's perspective is not taken seriously**

Both R1 and R2 are concerned that the role of broader power structures in society might be marginalised. Both refer to political systems and structures, and to narratives that shape meaning and define power relations in society. Both of these disciplines are able to contribute unique perspectives on the relationships between the individual and the social/collective, and between people and systems of power.

R3 is particularly concerned about the absence of structures to resolve conflict. The unique contribution of industrial/organisational psychology could be its insights into conflict, and the mechanisms that it has developed to make meaningful engagement possible.

This is limited as an example of the application of the transversal rationality to this study because the number of participants was limited and they reflected on one interview using questions that were limited in scope. However, it does indicate the different insights that can emerge from multiple perspectives. I have included it for its illustrative value.

In the following section, a more comprehensive transversal interdisciplinary conversation will engage with the disciplines of social psychology, organisational psychology, and political science in order to develop an alternative story to the dominant xenophobia

narrative that is offered as an explanation for the violence against foreigners in South Africa.

## PART TWO

### TRANSVERSAL INTERDISCIPLINARY LITERATURE STUDY

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will argue that, as much as it may be accurate, the label of xenophobia obscures more of the problem than it illuminates. I will propose an alternative story to the xenophobia narrative, one of conflict, and explain how it provides insight into the way meaning is being constructed in relation to foreigners. In the following chapter I will argue that it creates options for social change that the xenophobia narrative does not.

In order to develop and thicken this alternative story, I will engage in an interdisciplinary conversation with descriptions of social identity theory, conflict theory, and with the poststructuralist political theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Each of these perspectives is able to illuminate the research problem in a unique way, and it may be helpful to use the metaphor of three beams of light to describe the way in which I will bring these perspectives to bear on this research. This conversation will reflect the transversal rationality proposed by Schrag (1992, 1997) and Van Huyssteen (1999, 2006). The intention is to create an interdisciplinary ecotone (Müller 2011), with the hope that the intersection of various rationalities will create an “edge effect” of new meanings as well as possibilities for the dislocation of discourses that reflect thin descriptions of the violence against foreigners in South Africa.

##### 6.1.1 What is xenophobia?

In 2004, the United Nations Commission for Social Development (UNCSD) argued that the “exploitation, discrimination, xenophobia and racism towards immigrants” are “scourges” (UNCSD 2004). The term “xenophobia” has been described in various ways. A fairly broad description understands xenophobia as “attitudes, prejudices, and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity” (International Labour Organisation, International Organization for Migration and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2001). It has also been taken to mean fear of differences that are embodied in persons or groups (Berezin 2006), the intense dislike and hatred or fear of others (Nyamjoh 2006), or as hostility towards strangers and all that is foreign (Stolcke 1999).

Some views of xenophobia see it as a form of prejudice that extends towards non-citizens, but it can also be directed towards other marginal groups such as ethnic minorities – even third or fourth generation descendants of immigrants (Crush & Ramachandran 2009). Xenophobia has also been closely tied to racism and persists in newer characterisations of racism as “cultural racism” or “differential racism” (Arun 2001; Delanty & Millward 2007). Other terms that have been used to describe xenophobia include “nativism”, “ethno-centrism”, and “xeno-racism” (Fekete 2001).

### **6.1.2 The problem, the label, and the problem with the label**

There is clear evidence that suggests that the various descriptions of xenophobia are applicable to the violence against foreigners in South Africa. Glaser points out that xenophobic attitudes are evident in all of the research that has tested attitudes on this issue, prompting the observation that, in South Africa, “xenophobia really is coming up from below – it is profoundly democratic” (Glaser 2008b:53).

However, the deployment of a reified notion of xenophobia to account for the violence against foreigners in South Africa is problematic. While the label of xenophobia may provide an accurate description of the symptoms of this social malaise, there are risks that it may obscure the problem or over-simplify it. When xenophobia is reified and then taken for granted as an explanation for violence against foreigners it creates a certain understanding of how things are, why they are that way, and what should be done about the ways things are.

Kerr and Durrheim (2013) have shown that in at least one case, the violence against foreigners in De Doorns in November 2009, a simple explanation of xenophobia is inadequate. It fails to account for the displacement of South African workers from their dwellings on farms by farmers trying to avoid tenure obligations, or for the impact of labour brokers on the earnings of workers, and the resulting industrial action. They argue that, “Pronouncements of anti-xenophobic morality served simultaneously to defend a system which produced some of the very conditions for this violence to occur in the first place” (Kerr & Durrheim 2013:578).

An actual displacement of South African workers by Zimbabwean migrants took place during a strike by South Africans in protest against evictions, low wages, and precarious employment conditions. This resulted in attempts to expel the Zimbabwean migrants from

De Doorns, but not because they were foreigners – because of their sabotage of the efforts of the South African workers to obtain fair working conditions. As much as condemnations of the attacks expressed outrage at the eviction of foreigners, they also served to defend the structural status quo in which farmers exploited workers and broke labour laws. Farmers, who were unhappy about the human rights of foreign migrants being trampled on, showed scant remorse for their own trampling on the rights of their South African workers (Kerr & Durrheim 2013:593-594).

The use of the word xenophobia imports a moral diagnosis of the problem (Kerr & Durrheim 2013) that simultaneously condemns the actions of the perpetrators and deflects attention from other problems in the context. Is xenophobia the real problem? Or are there multiple real problems that need to be explored in any local context in which violence against foreigners takes place. Mngxitama touches on this when he asks whether people choose the easier option of feigning concern and condemn xenophobia “because to admit that ‘the current violence is not new and is a direct result of the wealth of a few’ is to ask for accounting. No, let’s not go there” (Mngxitama 2008a:198).

The use of a narrative of xenophobia to explain the violence imposes constraints on the search for solutions. Official responses to the violence against foreigners reflect this. On the one hand there is the somewhat unconvincing “xenophobia is bad” rhetoric, which includes statements like “Say no to Xenophobia” and “We are all Africans”. While these statements have an appeal through their claim to a perceived moral high ground, I question their effectiveness. None of the co-researchers who felt that their frustrations with foreigners were legitimate were under the mistaken impression that xenophobia was good or commendable, and all they needed was for their erroneous perceptions to be corrected.

Condemnation of xenophobia does not seem to be solving the problem of violence against foreign nationals, or the multiple problems in which the problem of violence is nested. The problem is compounded by the reality that official attempts to solve the problem tend to be at odds with official anti-xenophobia discourse, and involve police clampdowns on illegal immigrants (which effectively targets all immigrants) and attempts to deport them. This ‘solution’ only serves to reinforce elite discourses about foreigners being aliens who are a problem and a threat. Vigneswaran (2012) describes this as a “garbage can” model of policing in which foreign migrants are taken out of the country in the same way as trash is removed.

Kerr and Durrheim refer to anti-xenophobia discourse and argue that:

While these arguments serve to counter anti-foreigner rhetoric and practice, the danger is that they reify 'xenophobia' as an internal property or prejudice inherent to a person or population, which then becomes the specified problem, rather than analysing violence as one moment at the intersection of various groups of people who share (or do not share) particular histories and who relate within a particular political climate (Kerr & Durrheim 2013:583).

Without exception, co-researchers acknowledged that xenophobia was 'wrong' or 'bad', but most of them felt it was justified – or even necessary. They did not feel the way they felt about foreigners because they lacked a moral compass or the correct information. Attempts to address violence against foreigners by making negative moral judgements against it did not seem to have had much impact on the social construction of meaning among the co-researchers. In fact, it made them frustrated, and even angry, because it suggested that those making the judgement lacked empathy and perceived their frustrations with the conditions of their lives to be invalid. If a certain definition of the problem is both obscuring the problem and leading to ineffective solutions, it would seem appropriate to find ways of describing the problem that move beyond the label of xenophobia.

A Narrative approach will overcome this difficulty by avoiding the label of xenophobia. This is not to engage in some form of xenophobia denialism, but rather to describe the problem in a manner that creates distance between the problem and the people and communities affected by the problem. The creation of distance between people and their problem opens up possibilities to choose alternative narratives. A problem story that simply says, 'this is xenophobia' may be a very thin description of the problem (Geertz 1973). A thin description does not allow space for the complexities and contradictions of life, and is often externally imposed by those with the "power of definition", who are seen as experts or who have greater social power or status. Thin descriptions may obscure the problem, or limit people's knowledge, skills and abilities with the result that they become trapped in the problem story (Morgan 2000:12-14).

A Narrative approach requires that totalising labels are not used. Problems need to be named and externalised in order for the person's relationship with the problem to be revised (White & Epston 1990:38-76). This means that people are not totalised with labels that identify them with their problems. Instead, both the problem itself as well as the relationship that people have with the problem is seen as the problem, and this is explored.

### 6.1.3 Are there alternative stories to the dominant xenophobia story?

The stories of co-researchers speak of daring to hope that democracy would bring positive change to lives that had been diminished by racial oppression and structural inequality. These hopes were fuelled and given a sense of legitimacy by the promises of politicians to deliver a better life. However, even where positive changes occurred, these failed to address their personal needs and aspirations. The success of government in improving the lives of many leads to a greater sense of entitlement and increased resentment among those who feel neglected.

Within this context of hope deferred, a large influx of foreigners brought unexpected changes to the social and economic landscape of their communities. The impact of these changes was exacerbated by decades of isolation from the rest of Africa. At the same time, government's ability to deliver is being eroded by corruption and a failing education system that is not providing people with the skills that will give them a meaningful place in the economy. Foreigners are perceived to be competing illegitimately for scarce economic resources. They are perceived to be willing to work for less money. White South Africans treat them preferentially. They are more entrepreneurial and have skills that enable them to find work.

This gives them an upwardly mobile economic trajectory that eludes the majority of poor South Africans. Foreigners are receiving the benefits of freedom that remain elusive for many South Africans. South Africans are being pushed aside and marginalised in their own communities. This touches on the pain and loss of apartheid and colonialism. It also reinforces their sense that they are worth less than other people – even less than the foreigners, who are black like them. Who 'belongs' and is entitled to share in the country's resources becomes an increasingly important question. The 'problem of foreigners' is created by leaders, both national and local, as well as by the media. This 'problem' is offered to people by leaders as an explanation for their life conditions.

Once xenophobia is essentialised and on that basis assumed to explain the violence against foreigners in South Africa, the value judgements attached to the term risk obscuring the problem, or at the very least of over-simplifying it. Returning to Swart's (2013:24,61) argument, that there is a multiplicity of possible narratives because multiple interpretations are possible for what we experience in life, I was curious about what might emerge from an

alternative narrative about violence against foreigners in South Africa. The stories of co-researchers reflect a number of themes: their goals and aspirations, their context of poverty and lack, their interests and needs; the presence of foreign migrants in the communities; and their wrestling with how the intersection of all of these things creates a sense of who they are and their place in the world. It is therefore worth exploring the relationship between South Africans and foreigners as a story of conflict rather than a story of xenophobia. Both may be 'true', but the xenophobia story fails to describe the problem fully and in doing so it limits options for solving the problem.

At a most basic level their stories describe their identification with a certain group, and within that their adoption of a negative narrative about a group of people who are different from them in some way and who are perceived to have interests that compete with their own. A superficial examination of their narrative about foreigners might lead to the conclusion that it reflects unfounded and irrational generalisations, that this bigotry is unwarranted, and that their thinking needs to be changed through awareness programmes and education. A more comprehensive exploration of difference and prejudice will point in a different direction.

## **6.2 Difference: A trajectory of identity and prejudice**

My re-storying of xenophobia in South Africa finds its starting point in a critique by Kerr and Durrheim (2013) of a notion of prejudice that is deployed in anti-xenophobia discourse (Crush 2000, 2008; Valji 2003; Johnston 2007; Neocosmos 2010). Kerr and Durrheim explore the contextual causes of the violence that took place against foreigners in De Doorns in 2009 to dispute the assertion that violence against foreigners is xenophobic violence that is based on myths. According to this assertion, incorrect information and irrational thinking lies behind the violence against foreigners. However, the local issues that precipitated the violence are marginalised when the perpetrators of violence are uncritically placed in a position of moral degeneracy. The strength of Kerr and Durrheim's critique is their argument that describing the violence against foreigners as xenophobia "problematizes violence rather than the issues that are offered as explanations for such violence, which it often writes off as 'xenophobic myths'" (2013:579-580). The weakness of their argument is that their dismissal of prejudice is based on a description of prejudice that was nearly seventy years old. It seems extraordinary that they were unable to find

descriptions of prejudice that were more current (and more congruent with their own epistemological assumptions) than Allport's 1954 work on prejudice (Kerr & Durrheim 2013:582). While recent work on prejudice may have undermined some of their specific conclusions, I will show that this body of work actually supports their broader concern about the manner in which anti-xenophobic discourse engages with the problem of violence against foreigners in South Africa.

### **6.2.1 Attempts to describe prejudice**

Gadamer proposed that it was only during the Enlightenment that prejudice came to have the negative connotation it has today. Prior to that, negative views based on human difference were not examined and were simply regarded as legitimate. Gadamer ascribes the change to the Enlightenment's tendency to evaluate things based on reason rather than authority or tradition (1979:240-241). Billig offers Voltaire's statement that "prejudice is an opinion without judgement" as an example of this understanding of prejudice as erroneous or irrational thinking (Voltaire 1929:351, cited in Billig 2012:147). Prejudice was something that arose from a lack of judgement or from faulty judgement, or in Wetherell's (2012:160) words, "Prejudice became firmly associated with the mischief of irrationality which all decent post-Enlightenment citizens would wish to avoid".

The accuracy of the judgements people make about people who are different from them in some way has been the subject of enquiry since the middle of the nineteenth century.

#### *6.2.1.1 Scientific racism*

During the second half of the nineteenth century, psychology favoured a notion of scientific racism. According to this, race was a scientific construct and researchers tried to study the psychological differences between races (Dixon & Levine 2012). The reality was that this psychology of race only produced weak evidence to support the idea that there were fundamental psychological differences between races (Reynolds, Haslam & Turner 2012:51).

The 1920's saw psychologists and social psychologists move away from the doctrine of scientific racism. This was due in part to social, political and ideological changes in the USA and elsewhere that made social scientists uncomfortable with race psychology and its agenda. Attitudes that had been seen as a reflection of social realities came to be seen as a social problem (see Richards 1997 for a detailed review). The term 'prejudice' wasn't

relevant to these studies because the ideas that were held about other races were regarded as a reasonable way to understand real differences between races.

#### *6.2.1.2 Stereotypes*

The notion of stereotypes was first introduced in 1922 by journalist, Walter Lippmann in his book, *Public Opinion*. They were simplified generalisations about members of social groups. Lippmann argued that stereotyping was necessary because the task of seeing each person as an individual was overwhelming. Stereotyping is a function of cognitive economy that makes social judgement manageable. This leads to “a partial and inadequate way of representing the world” (Lippmann 1922:72, cited by Reynolds et al 2012:53). Lippmann’s thinking was to influence later research on cognition and prejudice (for example, Fiske & Taylor 1984).

#### *6.2.1.3 Scapegoating*

Dollard et al (1939), who were heavily influenced by Freud, argued that prejudice was an expression of unconscious and irrational defence mechanisms like repression and projection. People experience frustrations in their day to day lives. This leads to aggression that is difficult to channel in an appropriate way. Aggressive energy builds up, but cannot be directed at the target of the aggression when it is released, so it is displaced onto more vulnerable targets because this is safer. Victims of scapegoating are therefore typically members of minority groups who are weaker and have less social status. Reynolds et al point out that:

By definition, the motivational dynamics that underpin this process were understood to be irrational ...once triggered ... scapegoating produced hostility automatically - through a sequence that was defined purely psychologically and which was affected neither by the social context nor by any meaningful social relationship between aggressor and victim (Reynolds et al 2012:52).

#### *6.2.1.4 Maladapted personality*

After the Second World War there was renewed interest in prejudice. The American Jewish Committee published *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al 1950). Their thesis was that certain people are predisposed towards prejudice because they have maladjusted personalities as a result of their upbringing. They describe a hierarchical, authoritarian, exploitative parent-child relationship that, in their view will,

...culminate in a political philosophy and social outlook which has no room for anything but a desperate clinging to what appears to be strong and a disdainful rejection of what is relegated to the bottom. The inherent dramatization likewise extends from the parent-child dichotomy to the dichotomous conception of sex roles and moral values as well as the dichotomous handling of social relations as manifested especially in the forming of stereotypes and of ingroup-outgroup cleavages (Adorno et al 1950:971).

A certain kind of upbringing creates people with a personality that predisposes them to gravitate towards and follow those who have power and abuse those who do not. As with Dollard, there is no suggestion of a social relationship with the targets of their prejudice; prejudice is a general orientation that people have due to their inner issues and conflicts.

Other research in the mid twentieth century identified aspects of personality that could lead to prejudice: things like dogmatism, closed-mindedness, intolerance of ambiguity, rigidity (Rokeach 1954, in Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1994). This led to the assertion that prejudice was more of a cognitive style than an issue of personality (see Kruglanski 2004 for a review of this scholarship). Within this shift from personality to cognition, prejudice was still seen primarily as a psychological construct.

#### *6.2.1.5 The result of ignorance*

An understanding of prejudice that sees it arising from ignorance is found in UNESCO's first statement on the "race question" (UNESCO 1950). This report called for the dissemination of scientific facts in order to bring an end to racial prejudice. Reicher (2012) points the somewhat optimistic nature of this belief that racism is the result of a misunderstanding of the facts, and that once such misunderstandings are dispelled by scientific facts, prejudice will be resolved.

#### *6.2.1.6 Allport and "The Nature of Prejudice"*

Allport's (1954) work on prejudice incorporated a number of these ideas: the Freudian view of primitive inner processes and impulses that motivate people to behave in certain ways; the view that certain personalities predispose people towards prejudice; and the view that putting people and things into categories is part of human cognition. He defined prejudice in terms of thinking badly of others without an adequate reason for doing this. Allport added ideas on social norms and cultural socialisation: the view that prejudice could be a social norm in certain groups; that there are "community patterns" in prejudice; and that socialisation and leadership play a role in the development of prejudice. He also explores

the notion of ethnocentrism, the idea that people view their own group more positively than they view other groups.

Reynolds et al summarises the contribution made by Allport:

In the end, Allport's work provides a strong statement of the prejudice meta-theory where the emphasis is placed on (a) the pathology of the prejudiced personality, (b) the invalidity of social stereotypes and (c) the inevitability of general psychological processes (motivational and cognitive) that produce those stereotypes (including ethnocentrism and socialization). Together, these ideas serve to consolidate the thesis that stereotypes and prejudice are both *necessary evils* - false and unjustified, but a reflection of the inherent limitations of human cognition (Reynolds et al 2012:54).

For Allport, prejudice in the broadest sense is “thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant” (1954:6), or “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization” (1954:9). Allport stresses the importance of being able to change ones opinion when given new information although he concedes that this can be inhibited by what he describes as emotional resistance. For Allport, the solution to prejudice is tolerance. The tolerant individual,

...is on friendly terms with all sorts of people...He makes no distinctions of race, colour, or creed. He not only endures but, in general, approves his fellow men...Tolerant children...come from homes with a permissive atmosphere. They feel welcomed, accepted and loved, no matter what they do...The greater mental flexibility of the tolerant person (even in childhood) is shown by his rejection of two-valued logic. He seldom argues that ‘there are only two kinds of people: the weak and the strong’; or that ‘there is only one right way to do anything’. He does not bifurcate his environment into the wholly proper and the wholly improper. For him there are shades of gray (Allport 1954:425-6).

Allport's descriptions of prejudice and tolerance pathologise the former, while presenting a somewhat utopian vision of society on the basis of the latter. This would be reflected in descriptions of prejudice that were to emerge later in the twentieth century and become the dominant perspective on prejudice until the first decade of the twenty first century.

#### *6.2.1.7 Traditional prejudice meta-theory*

Prejudice is traditionally understood to be the product of socialisation, combined with the way human beings are wired to process information. Dovidio and Gaertner describe the traditional understanding of prejudice:

Prejudice is commonly defined as an unfair negative attitude toward a social group or a member of that group. Stereotypes, which are overgeneralizations about a group or its members that are factually incorrect and inordinately rigid, are a set of beliefs that can accompany the negative feelings associated with prejudice. Traditional approaches consider prejudice, like other attitudes, to be acquired through socialization and supported by the beliefs, attitudes, and values of friends and peer groups (Dovidio & Gaertner 1999:101).

The stereotypes that form the basis for prejudice in this view are the product of cognitive processes. The view of the human brain as some kind of cognitive miser finds its origins in Simon's (1983) theory of bounded rationality. According to Simon, human beings have evolved with limited capacity for attention, knowledge, and information processing. The cognitive miser bases social judgements on brief heuristic processing of minimal observations (Barone, Maddux & Snyder 1997:133). This means that our brains cannot deal with the complexity of the social world so we simplify information about other groups, causing distorted perceptions (Fiske & Taylor 1984). Human reliance on group based categorisations occurs because people do not have the cognitive resources needed for the complexities of the social environments in which they live (Fiske & Neuberg 1990; Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen 1994).

This view has come to dominate explanations for prejudice. Prejudice is defined as a negative attitude towards members of a group that is based on their membership of the group and nothing more (Brown 1995:6). Prejudice is therefore irrational and unjustifiable.

To the extent that Kerr and Durrheim (2013) criticise a description of the violence against foreigners in South Africa as xenophobia that is the result of irrational and unjustifiable bias, their criticism is helpful. Furthermore, if violence against foreigners is simply an expression of prejudice, understood this way, anti-xenophobia rhetoric that employs positive slogans about foreigners might be an effective way to curb violence against foreigners. However, a more comprehensive exploration of current descriptions of prejudice will show the limits of Kerr and Durrheim's critique and of much of the anti-xenophobic discourse that is deployed to curb violence against foreigners in South Africa.

#### *6.2.1.8 Critiques of the traditional theory of prejudice*

This traditional understanding of prejudice was described as the "prejudice problematic" by Wetherell and Potter (1992) in their constructionist critique of it. This critique of the prejudice problematic is expanded in Dixon and Levine (eds) (2012). The traditional

approach to prejudice tends to essentialise it and then investigate it as a psychological abstraction. Much of the research on prejudice has approached it with a methodology and analysis that made the lone individual the subject of focus (Reicher 2007:825). This has had consequences for the way in which prejudice is conceived and for the nature of interventions that are proposed to combat prejudice.

The problem with this prevailing meta-theory of prejudice is that it starts out with a decontextualised understanding of human psychology that is then transferred onto social problems in the world. It ignores the role of intergroup relationships and the potential for boundaries of inclusion and exclusion to be renegotiated so that they become more or less inclusive and tolerant. It is therefore very pessimistic and at risk of seeing prejudice and stereotyping as intractable or impossible to overcome (Reynolds et al 2012).

Tajfel (1981) argued that prejudice and stereotypes are not primarily individual level issues - to the extent that they are problems it is because they are the products of social interaction that is shared by group members and they serve group purposes (see also Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty & Reynolds 1998).

While it is true that prejudice can be an expression of unfounded or irrational attitudes, prejudice can also truthfully represent certain aspects of relationships between groups as they are seen from a particular social perspective. This follows Sherif's (1967) argument that there is a kind of "psycho-logic" to prejudice that emerges from social realities and, in turn, reflects these realities.

This creates a dilemma, which is captured by Wetherell, "The difficulty is this - what counts as a rational judgement? When is a description merely factual and when is it an interested account? If prejudice is 'thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant', then what is adequate warrant?" (Wetherell 2012:163). The question illustrates the classic dilemma of positivism, in which facts are set in opposition to values. Accusations of prejudice are limited in their effectiveness. Wetherell shows how people employ the rhetorical device of "factual accounting" to mitigate the offence of prejudice. They argue (and believe) that what they express isn't prejudice, it's an accurate description of the other group (Wetherell 2012:164).

If prejudice was a product of childhood socialisation, or a rigid personality, or limitations in human cognition it would be unlikely to change. "If personality or universal cognitive

processes are ineluctable forces that lead people to perceive and treat others unreasonably, then where is the potential for social change and for more progressive social relations?” (Reynolds et al 2012:54). A longitudinal analysis of prejudice and stereotyping studies suggest that they do change. There are many examples of things like sexism, racism and homophobia being identified as social problems and then tackled effectively (Reynolds et al 2012).

Wetherell argues that while prejudice can be framed as a natural reaction that is unavoidable, an instinctive aversion to difference, it can also be seen as a conscious choice for which people are morally accountable and which can be changed. Tolerance tends to be portrayed as the moral position, while prejudice is the deviant position. “The whole thrust of the prejudice problematic, therefore, encourages a discourse characterised by circumambulation and avoidance. Everybody wants to be tolerant and nobody wants to be prejudiced” (Wetherell 2012:168). There is a contrast created between prejudice and tolerance that constructs the prejudiced person as a “bestial other” and the self as rational and thoughtful. While the pathology of the prejudiced person warrants examination and judgement, the same scrutiny is not applied to oneself, or to the power relations in society.

However, while tolerance consists of vague talk of goodwill and benevolence, it fails to investigate exactly what needs to change in society to make these, and the challenge of conceiving of shared interests, possible. For Wetherell, this creates a problem, “The prejudice problematic feeds into and reinforces a utopian vision of society as well as of the individual personality. The tolerant society is based around rationality, justice and caring feelings for others” (2012:166). She notes Charlie Husband’s (1986) critique of tolerance, that it represents a “largesse of the powerful”.

Wetherell (2012) is critical of traditional view of prejudice described in the prejudice problematic. There are unresolvable tensions created by this view: between facts and values, between the particular and the universal, between manifest prejudice and latent prejudice. The prejudice problematic presents challenges for addressing prejudice. If prejudice is a form of pathology, then the cure for prejudice is education and tolerance. People would first need to be convinced that they are prejudiced and that their stories about the other group are incorrect. It is difficult to imagine people readily admitting to being prejudiced in this way, but if they did make such an admission their attitudes would be addressed in workshops and through contact with the other group (Wetherell 2012).

In Wetherell's view the most significant weakness of the prejudice problematic is that its focus on prejudice as a personal pathology is at the expense of power relations and the conflicting vested interests of groups in society. The focus within the prejudice problematic on changing people's attitudes discourages engagement with social structural change. Wetherell's analysis of racism in New Zealand is that the problem is not that one community has irrational delusions in relation to another ethnic community, but rather that society has been "systematically structured and organised around one particular nexus and concentration of power" (2012:173).

## **6.2.2 Social identity and group membership**

The development of social identity theory over the past thirty years provided new insights into the social phenomenon we describe as prejudice (Oakes et al 1994; Oakes & Turner 1990; Turner & Oakes 1997; Turner & Reynolds 2001). Social identity theory had its origins in Tajfel's work on social categorisation and focused on the causes and consequences of identifying with a social group or category. Prejudice is linked to the dynamics of intergroup relations and the way that people make sense of these relations and construct shared ways of understanding their world (Tajfel 1978).

### *6.2.2.1 Prejudice as a mechanism for group survival*

A view of prejudice that emerges from evolutionary biology regards it as a mechanism for surviving in a hostile and challenging environment. For most of human history, people lived in small groups. Acceptance in the group and support from the group were critical for survival. As a consequence of this, individuals adapted to the group by embracing group behaviours and values. High levels of identification with one's own group, along with the threat posed by other groups resulted in the formation of prejudices against other groups. The pervasiveness of this tendency to form prejudices against other groups may be explained by its biological origins. Prejudice provided social stability and served to protect group interests (Flohr 1987:197-198).

### *6.2.2.2 People are simultaneously individuals and group members*

The individual self does not exist separate from the social self. Identity unites the individual and the social. "It is not, as psychologists typically assume, that the personal self (e.g. personality) is fixed and fundamental, and the social self is then superimposed on top of this layer of individuality. The fact that we can behave both as individuals *and* group

members is a highly adaptive feature of the human mind and one that makes the broad range of human social behaviour possible” (Reynolds et al 2012:57).

Within social identity theory and self-categorisation theory there is a basic distinction between personal identity and social identity. People can categorise themselves at various levels of inclusiveness (me versus you or us versus them). In some situations the self can be categorised at more inclusive levels, in other situations at less inclusive levels. Group behaviour is made possible by this ability to shift from the personal to the social level of identity (Turner et al 1987).

When people form group memberships they create collective products such as shared identities, slogans, symbols, rituals, stereotypes, norms, values and goals. These cultural products are internalised by people and become part of their psychological makeup. When they act according to this changed psychology they are acting as group beings (Sherif 1967).

People act in accordance with their flexible self-definitions. Social identity concerns take precedence over individual factors such as personality when intergroup interactions become conflictual (Reynolds et al 2012). Research findings show that social identity tends to become more salient as people move from social contexts in which they make social comparisons within groups to ones in which comparisons are made between groups, and this has consequences for social behaviour (Haslam et al 1995; see Onorato & Turner 2002 for a review). This salience of social identity does not only lead to the homogenisation of perceptions in the group, but also to alignment of behaviour in which people act in terms of shared group membership. The social behaviour that arises from social identity makes other group processes such as cohesion and cooperation, communication and influence, and coordination and organisation possible (Haslam 2004).

Individual differences in attitude are useful in predicting things like prejudice when individuals are acting alone, but less so when they are in groups (Reynolds et al 2012). Self-categorisation theory proposes that as self-categorisation moves from the level of personal identity to the level of social identity there is a change in how the self is perceived. This has an impact on cognitions, attitudes, preferences and actions. As self-categorisation shifts to the level of social identity, the content of the self alters in a process described as depersonalisation (Turner 1982). Depersonalisation explains the difference between being and acting as an individual and being and acting as a group member.

### 6.2.2.3 Group identity and intergroup relations

Tajfel (1969) proposed that prejudice starts with the categorising of people into distinct groups. Once this has been done, certain behavioural characteristics and qualities are attributed to that group and are believed to be typical of its members.

Within intergroup relations, dimensions of social difference such as race, culture, and gender are rarely viewed as different but equal categories (Grossberg 1996:93). Instead, diversity is conceived of in binary and hierarchical terms.

Rydgren (2007:229) suggests that people evaluate their ingroup membership positively in order to evaluate themselves positively. This often leads to a denigration of members of outgroups. He goes on to say that people's tendency to think well of themselves and the groups to which they belong distorts the narratives they create to make sense of their lives and situations (2007:233). This sense of superiority seems to be what lies behind xenophobia as it is typically described by researchers. For example, Hammond and Axelrod (2006:926) write that, "According to Social Identity theory, ethnocentrism includes seeing one's own group (the ingroup) as virtuous and superior, one's own standards of value as universal, and outgroups as contemptible and inferior".

In order to understand prejudice from a social identity approach one has to examine intergroup relations to understand the kind of relationships that exist between the groups (Billig 1976, Tajfel 1981). When relationships between groups are perceived to be legitimate and stable, groups are more likely to have positive, accommodating views about the other (Reicher & Haslam 2006). The relationship between groups is also affected by features of the social system in which they are embedded. Do they share joint goals? Is there a conflict of interest?

There are shared beliefs and collective ideologies in a group, and these inform their understanding of themselves, their relationship with outgroups, and of the wider society in which they live. Tajfel (1981) argued that stereotypes and prejudice are not primarily individual level issues - to the extent that they are problems it is because they are the products of social interaction that is shared by group members and they serve group purposes (see also Haslam et al 1998).

The perspective that people have on the world is typically a collective one that is shaped by processes of social interaction and influence. To the extent that individual identity is a

function of group identity, individuals will coordinate their views with other ingroup members. The attitudes of people are shaped by the norms, values and beliefs of the group to which they belong. These in turn are shaped by the realities of intergroup relationships and by understandings of “them” and what they mean for us (Reynolds et al 2012). “Prejudices are thus products of social processes of influence, communication and leadership and always have an ideological dimension” (Reynolds et al 2012:59). An implication of this is that people struggle to see the views of their own ingroups as prejudice, especially if they identify with those views (Reicher, Haslam & Rath 2008). They develop ways to justify their views as factual and accurate.

### **6.2.3 A new paradigm for understanding prejudice**

#### *6.2.3.1 Prejudice and social power*

From the perspective of social identity theory, prejudice is shaped by the nature of social relationships and the social identity processes that are part of these. “Prejudice is an outcome of social and political dynamics. It is constructed dynamically - in the long term and contemporaneously - as an aspect of theories, ideologies and knowledge that shapes the needs and realities of the individual person in specific settings” (Reynolds et al 2010:65). The new theory of prejudice is defined by the recognition that prejudice begins with social realities, moves through group identities and the political and social ideologies that are linked with these, and then shapes the attitudes and actions of the individual. Prejudice can be viewed as a process that is bound up with the social identities of the perceivers and the dynamics of relationships between groups (Reynolds et al 2012).

Social constructionism has shaped the way that social and individual identity is understood. Identity functions to define the self as both an individual and as a member of a group. By taking up subject positions with certain Discourses individuals define themselves as group members and act as group members. Identity is a function of subject positions that are taken up in various Discourses. Our language system creates distinctions and structures that are arbitrary and artificial. Adam (1995:29) describes how this operates: “Identity (the archfoundation of all our philosophical and theological foundations) is constructed when people decide that certain distinctions make a difference and others do not”. Bauman argues that the act of classifying “consists of the acts of inclusion and exclusion. Each act of naming splits the world in two: entities that answer to that name; all the rest do not.

Certain entities may be included into a class – *made a class* – only in as far as other entities are *excluded*, left outside” (Bauman 1991:2 emphasis in the original).

Reicher (2012) challenges underlying assumptions that undergird the framework within which psychologists typically explore social inequality and discrimination. He argues that prejudice is not about the *outgroup*; it reveals more about the ingroup than it does about its targets. He argues that prejudice not is about *perceptions* of the outgroup; it is related to ingroup authority and ingroup power rather than faulty thinking about the outgroup. For Reicher, prejudice is also not just about *negative qualities* that are perceived in the outgroup; they may also have positive characteristics that are perceived to represent a threat to the ingroup. Finally, he argues that prejudice is not about *ordinary group members* perceiving negative qualities in the outgroup. Against this, Reicher points to the assumption that prejudice is something people come to on their own, without any assistance, through a process of thought and reflection in the individual mind, “The more one thinks of it, the more bizarre this perspective comes to seem” (Reicher 2012:38). Reicher argues that prejudice is something that is mobilised by leaders and that this does not happen accidentally, there are always good reasons for the mobilisation of prejudice.

For Reicher, prejudice is part of our process of shaping the world rather than a flawed description of it. He writes, “If it is limiting to think of prejudice as perception, it is equally problematic to judge perception in terms of its accuracy. For if prejudice is about creating social reality as much as describing reality, the relevant question is not so much ‘are such views right or wrong?’ as ‘are they effective?’” A racist statement is an attempt to keep black people in their place. “It is about doing as much as saying. It is about shaping the future as much as describing the present” (Reicher 2012:35). In that sense prejudice is something deployed by people to maintain or extend their privilege, or gain some kind of advantage in society.

Prejudice and stereotyping are representational practices that construct the social world. They represent our understanding of “them”, what they signify for us, and more specifically, how they constitute a problem for us (Reicher 2012). The labelling of something as prejudice is part of the political process through which status is negotiated and contested (Reynolds et al 2012).

This emerging understanding of prejudice suggests that it offers insight into the needs and aspirations of its authors more than it reveals something about its target (Reicher 2012).

Rather than being an expression of flawed cognition, it is a strategy for shaping power relations in society. Reynolds et al suggest how this points to new possibilities for challenging prejudice.

On this basis we reject any suggestion that prejudice is rendered inevitable by the workings of human psychology - whether understood in terms of personality or general cognitive processes. Even at the very darkest moments of human history there has always been, and there will always be, the prospect of positive social and political change (Reynolds et al 2012:65).

### 6.2.3.2 Prejudice and mobilisation

Reicher (2012:13) makes an important point for understanding prejudice from the perspective of the new paradigm, “wherever we find prejudice, it has been mobilized, it has been mobilized deliberately, and it has been mobilized for gain”. The prejudice problematic neglects the role of mobilisation. For example, neither the role of leadership in prejudice, nor the potential of leaders to engage in manipulative rhetoric is mentioned in *The Nature of Prejudice* (Dovidio, Glick & Rudman 2005), one of the most comprehensive recent treatments of the traditional view of prejudice.

The views of people with regard to how others relate to them, and what they need to do about this, do not come about spontaneously. They are mobilised by leaders who have good reasons to mobilise hostility towards outgroups (Reynolds et al 2012). Leadership is a group process, and may be distributed quite widely in a group (Haslam et al 2010; Reicher 2007).

The violence against foreigners in South Africa provides a case study of how prejudice is mobilised. It illustrates the development of constructions of ‘them’ and ‘us’ that can lead us to exclude and even hate ‘them’, and how these constructions can be harnessed by leaders to serve various purposes.

Misago et al (2010) show that violence against foreigners was organised and led by local individuals and groups who saw popular frustration as an opportunity of mobilising people to commit violence. By constructing meaning around foreigners as a problem and a threat, local leaders were able to shape meaning around their role in the community and around solutions to the problems faced by the community. This allowed them to usurp authority from dysfunctional local government structures and use this authority for personal, political,

and economic benefits. Mobilisation played a key role in fomenting the violence. In some cases youths were “hired” by organisers to carry out attacks (Misago 2012)

Misago’s studies show that attacks on foreigners were carefully organised, either by informal leadership structures in affected communities, or by members of formal leadership structures who were acting in their own interests. These parallel leadership structures become dominant where poor service delivery, or perceptions of incompetence, corruption, favouritism has led to a lack of trust in formal leadership institutions. He observes that, “...organising attacks on and removing ‘unwanted’ outsiders has proved to be a highly effective strategy for earning people’s trust, gaining legitimacy, and expanding a client base and the revenue associated with it” (2012:100).

Tilly (2003:34) explores the role of parallel leadership structures in poor communities and argues that these leadership groups function as “political entrepreneurs”, who “... wield significant influence over the presence, absence, form, loci and intensity of collective violence. When they promote violence, they do so by activating boundaries, stories and relations that have already accumulated histories of violence”.

These histories of violence extend back to the first migrations of various people into South Africa and their clashes with indigenous people or other migrating groups. It has been argued that South Africa has developed a “culture of violence” in which violence is endorsed and regarded as a legitimate way to solve problems, achieve goals, and achieve justice (Kynoch 2005). The apartheid era was characterised by various forms of violence. There was considerable “vertical” violence that was directed against citizens by the state; there was also “horizontal” violence between rival social or political factions, particularly in the period between the unbanning of the ANC and first democratic elections in 1994 (Hamber 1999).

The violence of the late 1980’s and early 1990’s created a social context in which warlords or “comrades” were able to use violence for political gain. They built personal empires that have endured beyond the end of the struggle against apartheid. These parallel leadership structures play a role in the ongoing violence that continues to characterise South African society (Kynoch 2005). A result of the role violence has played as a means to achieving political goals is that in parts of South African society certain forms of violence have been idealised. The attribution of political motives to these forms of violence renders them legitimate and even noble in the eyes of many people (Kynoch 2005).

Violent action against criminals is one of these socially acceptable forms of violence and this is reflected in a post-1994 discourse that constructs social violence as crime fighting. Crime fighting vigilantes, whether they are organised groups or the spontaneous reaction of residents to crime, are a common feature of poor communities in South Africa. Their existence, and necessity, is explained with reference to a failing criminal justice system that is perceived to protect criminals at the expense of law-abiding citizens a lot of the time (Harris 2003).

This environment provides a context where the mobilisation of community members, based on the suggestion of a threat, is a powerful tool for processes of influence. Misago (2012) claims that a culture of impunity exists in South Africa in which perpetrators of public violence are seldom held accountable. In contexts of conflict this makes it easy for leaders to harness the cooperation of community members to address threats to the interests of the community, using violence if necessary.

This type of collective violence has been described as “contentious politics” because politics involves the collective making of claims between citizens and the state (Tilly 2003). Politics also focuses on both the management of plurality and the use of force (Basu 1995). Research has indicated that such collective violence tends to occur in times of socio-economic and political uncertainty and particularly when “social controls” or “stabilising parties” such as legitimate authorities and leadership are not present (Tilly 2003; Basu 1995:35-78).

The violence against foreigners in South Africa should not be analysed in a manner that neglects this broader production of collective violence as contentious politics. When it is simplistically equated with a reified notion of xenophobia, that has largely been the product of research in very different contexts, the power relations and struggles that are unique to South Africa are ignored, as is the history that has shaped them.

#### *6.2.3.3 Prejudice and dehumanisation*

For Haslam and Loughnan (2012), prejudice is not so much about the negative evaluation of a group as it is about dehumanisation. Prejudice enables those with relative power to exercise that power over other groups through a process that involves dehumanisation. Dehumanisation denies basic human attributes to certain people (Kelman 1976; Staub 1989).

Dehumanisation can be expressed as either a lack of human uniqueness or as a lack of proper human nature. The attributes of human uniqueness are generally seen as a product of social learning and enculturation. The attributes of human nature are seen as innate, fundamental characteristics such as emotionality, interpersonal warmth, and openness. These were also seen as cross-culturally universal and more prevalent among people (Haslam et al 2004)

These two distinct senses of humanness provide a framework for Haslam and Loughnan to understand how people's humanness is denied (Haslam 2006) People who are denied human uniqueness are perceived as not having civility, refinement, rationality and morality - they are seen as coarse, unintelligent and immoral and likened to animals (animalistic dehumanisation). People who are denied uniquely human attributes are seen to be lacking emotion and are seen as cold, mechanical, rigid, and lacking in vitality - they become like objects or machines (mechanistic dehumanisation). People can be denied each kind of humanness to varying extents (Haslam & Loughnan 2012).

Dehumanisation effectively legitimates the mistreatment, or even eradication, of others because if they are not fully human as we are, we are not bound to treat them as we would wish to be treated. Haslam et al (2000) noted that ethnic groups can easily be essentialised and then treated as though they are a different species. Interethnic conflicts also tend to be more explicit and organised, with the result that dehumanisation and its effects become more visible.

One does not have to look beyond the tragic dehumanisation of apartheid to recognise that the application of certain kinds of names and labels to human beings which are different in some way becomes the basis for their exclusion and persecution. There are many other such examples.

Holtz and Wagner (2009) investigated postings on internet discussion forums by extreme right-wing Germans. Groups such as Jews, Africans, Turks and Muslims tended to be described as ape-like, or as barbarians and parasites. In Canada, refugees and immigrants were often dehumanised and seen as unsophisticated, immoral barbarians. In this way, not only is disgust and contempt for these groups expressed, a social hierarchy is also constituted (Esses et al 2008; Costello & Hodson 2010).

Research on dehumanisation suggests that the use of derogatory names and labels allows the perpetration of atrocities against the dehumanised because it constitutes them as animals, or as vermin that need to be eradicated. Hagan and Rymond-Richmond (2008) studied the experiences of refugees from Darfur in the South Sudan who had been the victims of atrocities perpetrated by the Janjaweed militia and Sudanese government forces. A racial agenda of Arabisation that led to atrocities and genocide was reflected in dehumanising labels like “Nuba dog, son of dogs”, “You donkey, you slave, we must get rid of you” and “You blacks are like monkeys. You are not human”. The use of terms like “cockroaches” to describe Tutsi’s, by Hutu nationals prior to and during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, justified their extermination (Donahue 2012).

Reicher (2012) argues that the path to genocide is derived from two pairs of ingroup/outgroup relations where the ingroup is dominant. The first is a set of relations in which clear boundaries are drawn around the ingroup, thus explicitly excluding the outgroup. The second is a set of relations in which the virtue of the ingroup is emphasised and the outgroup is constructed as a threat. I would argue that this is compounded by the technologies of dehumanisation, which remove the social constraints that inhibit violent action against the outgroup.

These insights illuminate Luvuyo’s comments about the word *amakwerekwere* representing someone who is less than human. One can also reflect on dehumanising language that is being used in the construction of white South Africans as foreigners in which they are referred to as “pigs”. Dehumanising language is used to construct the foreign migrant as a thing, as an animal. Once constructed this way, they are no longer human beings with needs and hopes and fears; empathy is impossible. They become a pernicious threat, a menace that needs to be eliminated.

This process does not take place at the level of individual cognition. It is a group process that is mobilised to claim various types of power and advantage for the dehumanisers. Donahue argues that:

Creating these identity extremes through polarized language forms an “Identity Trap” in the sense that it frames the conflict as being about the clash of identities instead of focusing on substantive issues and the exploration of a middle ground. The more extreme and polarized the identities become, the bigger the trap that is created and the fewer choices people have to stay out of the conflict (Donahue 2012:16).

It is important to note that Donahue locates dehumanisation in the context of conflict. It is not a natural response to difference. It is mobilised against a perceived threat in a context where there are competing interests. The production of prejudice in such a context will be explored in the following section on conflict.

#### **6.2.4 Reflections on identity and prejudice**

It is undeniable that the violence against foreigners in South Africa reflects deep-seated prejudice. However, is it the prejudice of irrational bigotry, or is it the prejudice that mobilises people in pursuit of some advantage in a social space characterised by diffuse and competitive power relations?

South Africa is a country where differences matter. A history of racial classification has etched the identity markers of race and ethnicity deeply into the country's identity. Despite over twenty years of post-apartheid democracy, race and ethnicity are still themes that define the experience of what it is to be a South African. When difference is combined with relative powerlessness, the old patterns of dominance and exclusion seem easy to find.

The struggle to claim the full rights of citizenship, including meaningful participation in the economy, seems to have created a context where such things are seen to be at risk. The presence of those who are different from us, and their attempts to claim a stake of the economy, albeit often at a subsistence level, seems to threaten the already fragile existence of many poor South Africans. South Africa's Discourses of belonging, whether they refer to the urban metropolis or to citizenship as autochthony, are invoked against those who do not belong.

For co-researchers, the presence of foreigners in their communities signifies painful realities. At a political level, they signify the failure of the South African government to protect its borders, which echoes its failure to protect its citizens, especially the poorest of the poor. Foreigners signify the absence of meaningful change to their circumstances after 1994. For the co-researchers in this study, the presence of foreigners signifies hope deferred and hope lost.

At an economic level, those who do not belong, because they are not indigenous to this place, signify loss and what is seen as the theft of resources. They take economic opportunities to which they are not perceived to be entitled; they steal jobs, houses, social grants and women. Included in this signification are European settlers who have displaced

black South Africans and taken their land. In the minds of the co-researchers in this study, foreigners signify loss.

More personally, foreign migrants signify an elusive estimate of worth in terms of identity. Their entrepreneurial success, the marketable skills they bring with them, and the relative approval they are given by white South Africans all contribute to a comparison that reflects negatively on the South Africans among whom they live.

Foreign migrants constitute a problem because of this. They are a painful reminder of the tenacity of structural poverty; they are a reminder of what has been lost by black South Africans, and continues to be lost. More than this, in the eyes of the co-researchers in this study, they are a token of what we are unable to be: entrepreneurial, upwardly mobile, accepted. The cost of their presence is too great. Insofar as they are perceived to be an obstacle to the realisation of the aspirations of South Africans, they cannot be allowed to remain among us.

It does not matter if negative perceptions of foreigners are based on fact; what matters is whether they are believed. Throughout history, humans have clung to beliefs with enormous tenacity, despite the presentation of facts as evidence to the contrary. What is more, even if the things believed about foreign migrants could be disproved, such an approach to the problem would ignore the reasons *why* negative sentiments against foreigners are being deployed, and in so doing marginalise what might be solvable problems.

I hope that this reflection demonstrates that at the very least, the violence against foreigners is something more than irrational bigotry that has escalated into violence and that the narrative of xenophobia that is offered to explain the violence needs to be scrutinised. The construction of foreigners as a threat is taking place in the context of peoples' struggle to claim a place in the world for themselves. That struggle is inherently conflictual, and cannot be divorced from the social dynamics and power relations that stratify South African society.

### 6.3 Competing interests: A trajectory of conflict

Organisational conflict theory is offered as a lens for understanding the stories of the co-researchers in this research. The story that is consistently being told by South Africans to justify violence towards foreigners is a story of conflict and threat. The actions taken by South Africans in response to foreigners (whether these could be characterised as xenophobic or anti-xenophobic actions) represent well documented behaviours in response to conflict. Furthermore, describing this situation as a conflict avoids the *a priori* value judgements that come with a label like xenophobia. In the following section I will draw from conflict theory to develop and thicken this alternative story of the relationship between South Africans and foreign migrants as a story of conflict.

In this section I will approach the stories of co-researchers from the perspective of various approaches to the management of conflict in organisations. While these approaches are usually used to describe possible strategies for intragroup conflicts, there is no reason why descriptions of conflict in one human social environment cannot be a vehicle for understanding conflict in other social environments. Korsgaard, Jeong and Mahony (2008) have proposed a multilevel model of conflict in which parallel processes occur simultaneously at multiple levels of analysis. This suggests that, while the mechanisms available to resolve conflicts might differ from one context to another, the human processes of meaning making in relation to conflict will be the same and the broad ways in which conflict can be approached (as a spectrum of possible human behaviour) will not change. There is an emerging complexity perspective of conflict which argues that interpersonal relationships are more complex than previously thought, and that conflict is influenced by a wide variety of conditions as it unfolds (Munduate, Ganaza, Peiro & Euwema 1999).

Within a social constructionist perspective it is difficult to conceive of group interests not representing the interests of the individuals within those groups, or that there is not substantial overlap between individual and group interests. Furthermore, groups are comprised of individuals, and the identification of individuals with a group does not generate new strategies for dealing with conflict that do not fall within the possibilities described above.

Intergroup conflict has been shown to increase intragroup cooperation (Rabbie 1982; Tajfel 1982). It can create higher levels of concern for group interests and goals, and thus motivate individual members to pursue these and identify more strongly with the group. The

presence of intergroup conflict can also induce individuals to act in accordance with group interests to the extent that they perceive these to be aligned with their private interests (Messick & Brewer 1983).

There may also be tensions between group interests and the interests of individual members, particularly where identification with group interests might expose individuals to risks that some deem to be unacceptable (Bornstein 2003). There is never complete overlap between group interests and individual interests and this might explain why not all group members will voluntarily engage in violent actions if these might incur negative consequences, or might be construed as morally wrong.

### 6.3.1 Describing conflict

Conflict has been described in various ways. It can refer to any situation where there is opposition among parties with regard to their attitudes, values, interests, plans, intentions, or definitions of their relationship (Becker-Beck 2001:261). It has also been described as an awareness of difference, discrepancies, incompatible wishes, or irreconcilable desires (Sell, Lovaglia, Mannix, Samuelson & Wilson 2004). Thomas proposed a simple description of conflict, arguing that it is a process that begins when an individual or group feels negatively affected by another individual or group because of the perception that the other party represented barriers to the achievement of one's goals (Thomas 1992).

These descriptions presuppose a degree of interdependence between the parties as well as some kind of incompatibility or opposition (Medina, Dorado, de Cisneros, Arevalo & Munduate 2004). The co-researchers in this research all live in a social context where there is interdependence between themselves and other residents, including foreign migrants living among them. The stories they tell about the impact of foreigners are univocal in their agreement about the perceived negative impact of foreigners on their lives.

A description of conflict that synthesises contemporary characterisations of conflict, and that reflects the narratives of co-researchers in this research, comes from Korsgaard et al (2008:1224) who describe it as, "*the experience between or among parties that their goals or interests are incompatible or in opposition*" (see also Barki & Hartwick 2004; De Dreu & Gelfand 2007; Wall & Callister 1995). Experience refers to the beliefs and perceptions related to a conflict, the affective responses to a conflict, and behavioural reactions to it. Goals and interests refer broadly to aspirations, desired outcomes, beliefs and values, and

the degree to which these are incompatible in a context of interdependence. Conflict may also occur where there is perceived interference with or obstruction of one party's pursuit of its goals or interests by another party. Finally, conflict occurs between and among parties; it can occur between individuals, among individuals, within groups, and between groups (De Dreu & Gelfand 2007).

This description of conflict is significant because of the starting point of experience. It does not matter if people's perception of their experience seems rational to others, or if it seems to be supported by evidence. The perception of many South Africans is that as foreigners pursue their goals in a particular context (whether these are a subsistence level of survival or economic prosperity) this creates a conflict of interest. The aims of foreigners to make a living, find housing, and develop social networks are perceived to limit the ability of locals to do these things. The context of extreme poverty, unmet expectations, and deferred hopes makes these issues critical for South Africans, who perceive foreigners as a threat.

#### *6.3.1.1 Structure or process?*

Earlier research into conflict tended to focus on contextual factors and the nature of interdependence and incompatibility between parties (see Deutsch 1949; Emerson 1962; Blau 1964). Conflict emerges from the structural relationship between the parties.

A structural view of conflict tended to view it as some kind of temporary disruption to the normal equilibrium of relationships (Pondy 1967). This has been replaced by a view of conflict as something that is a constant condition of interpersonal relationships. Conflict is an inherent condition of social interaction rather than a sequence of discrete isolated incidents, and conflict episodes occur simultaneously rather than sequentially (Pondy 1989, 1992b; Euwema, Van de Vliert & Bakker 2003). Conflict is therefore ubiquitous in social interaction; the relative impact of underlying structural issues and ways in which people react to the conflict are what changes.

The focus on structural issues has been superseded by an understanding of conflict as a process in which structural issues - such as scarce resources, power and interdependence - provide the latent conditions (Pondy 1967). Interaction between parties, in the context of latent conditions such as these, triggers processes of sense-making in which people attempt to understand the meaning and significance of events (Neuman & Baron 1998). This sense-making during conflict has been described as a process of naming and then

blaming (Felstiner, Abel & Sarat 1980). The event or experience is identified as offensive, and this is accompanied by a perception that the other party caused harm or violated norms. The sense-making process results in an interaction or set of circumstances is being perceived to be both unfavourable and attributable to the other party. This story that is told about events creates an awareness of conflict, which in turn leads to feelings, thoughts and actions in response to the conflict (Pondy 1967; Thomas 1992). During this process patterns of interpretation and action emerge which are likely to shape subsequent conflicts. Similar triggering events evoke familiar patterns of sense-making, leading to certain feelings and behaviour being repeated as reactions to conflict (Douglas et al 2008; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell 2008).

There is widespread agreement that structural issues such as poverty, inequality and chronic unemployment are enabling factors that contribute to violence against foreigners (see Misago 2012), but these have not been regarded as sufficient for the production of overt violence against foreigners. However, the role of these issues in fomenting conflict can be seen in the narratives of co-researchers. Pondy (1967) argued that conflict follows a course that proceeded from latent to perceived conflict stages, and then erupted into manifest conflict. In terms of the process described by Pondy, issues such as poverty, inequality and unemployment create the conditions for latent conflict, contribute to actual perceptions of conflict, and play a role in the escalation into manifest conflict.

Process perspectives of conflict emphasise the role of perceptions and feelings in conflict. The way that people perceive things and react during conflict is shaped by feelings and limited by imperfect perceptual processes, with the result that how much correspondence there is between various interpretations or perceptions of events and circumstances is not important (Kumar 1989). This suggests that attempts to tell people that their perceptions are “myths” (Johnston 2007) are not likely to solve the problem. Equally, telling them that their knowledge is “wrong” on the basis of generalisations, such as there are not as many foreigners in the country as they think (Crush 2000), or that foreigners aren’t really taking jobs from foreigners (Valji 2003; Crush 2008) are unlikely to change people’s perceptions of what is true in their context. These attempts to tell people that their experience has no basis in reality are problematic.

Behavioural responses to conflict might not seem like rational responses to the structural conditions that precipitated the conflict, particularly to observers. However, if people’s

knowledge and understanding of their lives is constructed socially and intersubjectively, the question of whether their knowledge and perceptions are 'true' or accurate becomes marginal. In the absence of more plausible alternative stories their understanding of reality will reflect the current stories.

### *6.3.1.2 Levels at which conflict takes place*

Lewicki et al (2003) summarise four primary levels of conflict within human behaviour and relationships that have been identified in conflict research:

1. Intergroup conflicts, including conflict between nations. These are conflicts between groups of individuals and they can vary in size and complexity.
2. Intragroup or intraorganisational conflicts. These arise within smaller groups which make up the organisation or community.
3. Interpersonal conflict. This refers to conflict between individuals, or conflict between an individual and a group.
4. Intrapersonal conflict. This is conflict that occurs on a personal level, within an individual's own mind.

When viewed within this typology, the violence between South Africans and foreign nationals seems to involve conflict at every level. While the first level of intergroup conflict may be more obvious, there is certainly no consensus within groups in communities affected by the violence. The conflict is also evident at the interpersonal level, and internal conflict may arise from incompatibility between the negative moral judgements made against xenophobia and the actions individuals take as a result of hostility towards foreigners. I would argue that viewing this typology as an integrated and constantly morphing amalgam of various aspects of conflict rather than discrete elements is more helpful. How does one delineate and separate the interplay between the intrapersonal and the interpersonal without losing the meaning and influence of either? Furthermore, when these conflict processes are viewed holistically the processes of meaning making in individuals and groups are linked with their strategies and actions as they pursue both individual and group interests.

### **6.3.2 The consequences of conflict**

Conflict can be regarded as either functional or dysfunctional. Furthermore, conflict is contextually and perceptually relative because different actors experiencing the same

occurrence of conflict can experience and perceive the consequences of the conflict in different ways (Jehn & Chatman 2000).

#### *6.3.2.1 Conflict as dysfunctional*

The traditional view of conflict regarded it as dysfunctional. It represented a breakdown in authority structures and a failure to maintain appropriate systems of control (Pondy 1992b). Conflict that involves negative interdependence, where one party wins at the expense of the other, will be viewed negatively (Janssen, Van de Vliert & Veenstra 1999).

Where conflict is perceived as negative it increases tension and antagonism between individuals and the focus on tasks is impeded (Saavedra, Earley & Van Dyne 1993; Wall & Nolan 1986). The long term negative consequences of negative perceptions of conflict include diminished creativity and problem-solving ability, groupthink, and the escalation of existing conflict (De Dreu 1997).

#### *6.3.2.2 Conflict as functional*

There is significant recent research into the outcomes of conflict that suggest that not all conflict is negative (De Dreu 1997; Pelled, Eisenhardt & Xin 1999; Rahim 2002; Simons & Peterson 2000; Schultz-Hardt et al 2002; Schwenk 1990; Wall & Callister 1995). In fact, when managed in certain ways, conflict can have a positive effect on relationships. Conflict calls attention to problem areas (Pondy 1992b) can become an opportunity to address issues, understand problems affecting the parties, and find creative solutions. Conflict in communities has the potential to create high levels of stimulation and activation among community members. It can enhance the ability to adapt or innovate. It also functions as a source of feedback regarding relationships and the distribution of power (Miles 1980). This requires acceptance of the conflict, rather than suppression or avoidance (De Dreu 1997).

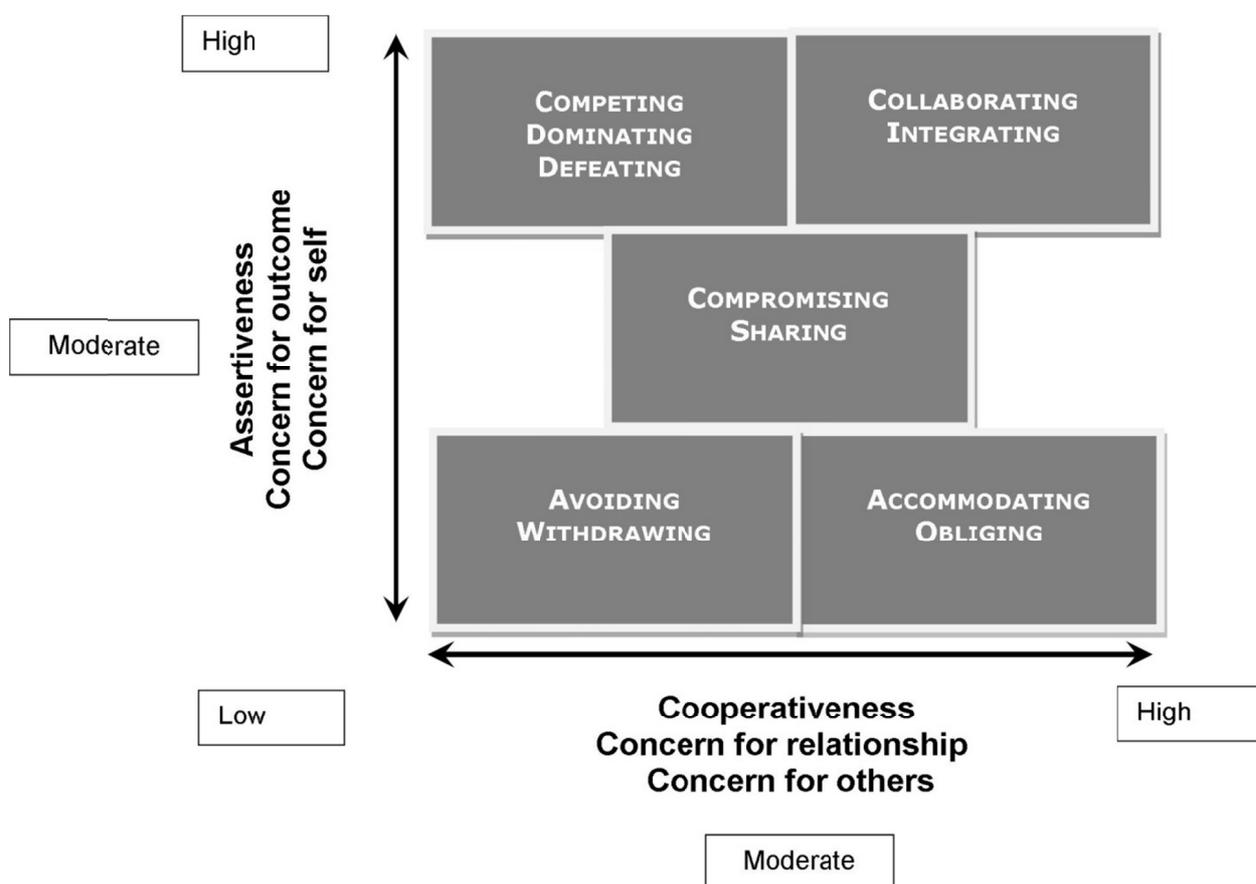
This recognition of the functional aspects of conflict resulted in a shift from a focus on eliminating or preventing conflict to a focus on the management of conflict (Rahim 2002). Research has shown that it is the manner in which conflict is addressed that determines the outcome, rather than the dynamics of the conflict itself (Amason 1996).

### **6.3.3 Strategies for dealing with conflict**

The dual-concern model of conflict management, based on the work of Blake and Mouton

(1964), assumes that different strategies are chosen to manage conflict based on some variations of two primary concerns – concern for self and concern for others. Thomas (1983) described this in terms of the dual behavioural orientation dimensions of assertiveness or cooperativeness. The extent to which attempts are made to satisfy one’s own needs is measured as a degree of assertiveness; the extent to which attempts are made to satisfy the needs of others is measured as a degree of cooperativeness. These two dimensions give rise to five approaches to managing conflict (Rahim 1983; Thomas & Kilmann 1974; Thomas 1983). Various vocabularies have been used for this model, depending on the context and nature of the conflict. These can be depicted as follows:

Figure 6.1 Conflict modes



### 6.3.3.1 Distributive versus integrative approaches to conflict

These five approaches to conflict management can be categorised into two groups. They approach the conflict in a distributive manner or an integrative manner. The distributive approach views the conflict as a zero-sum competition. The metaphor of a house is helpful to illustrate this. Parties are competing for space in the house and if one party gains the

other party loses. The distributive approach to conflict is therefore characterised as a win-lose approach and leads to strategies of dominating or obliging. One integrative approach is both cooperative and assertive and attempts to build a bigger house by identifying and satisfying the needs of all the parties. This integrative approach to conflict is therefore characterised as a win-win approach to conflict (Lewicki & Litterer 1985).

Another approach that could be described as integrative involves avoiding conflict. It reflects both non-cooperativeness and a lack of assertiveness and reduces the size of the house by neglecting the concerns of all parties (Thomas 1992). If the relationship between South Africans and foreign migrants is described as a conflict much of the anti-xenophobic rhetoric, that arises in response to what are highly competitive strategies being deployed against foreigners, could be categorised as attempts at conflict avoidance.

Various studies have shown that the interrelationships among the constructs are consistent with those described in the model (Van de Vliert & Kabanoff 1990; Van de Vliert & Euwema 1994; Rahim & Magner 1995) and that the five styles derived from the two dimensions provide a reliable basis for the selection of conflict management strategies (Sorenson, Morse & Savage 1999).

Much of the literature on these approaches applies them to individual behaviour, although they have been applied to group behaviour as well. Schopler and Insko (1992) showed that groups tend to adopt a much more competitive approach than individuals. This has also been observed in bargaining processes, where groups consistently make less generous offers than individuals (Bornstein & Yaniv 1998; Robert & Carnevale 1997).

#### *6.3.3.2 Which approach is best?*

Broadly speaking, there have been three perspectives on the issue of which approach to use in conflict situations (Speakman & Ryals 2010).

#### *6.3.3.3 The “one best way” perspective*

This perspective argues that one conflict management style or behaviour, collaboration, is more effective than any of the others (Sternberg & Soriano 1984). Within this approach there is also the view that people have behavioural predispositions towards certain ways of dealing with conflict and may have a natural preference for any one of the styles (Thomas & Kilmann 1974). Collaboration is regarded as the most constructive solution because it is

always positively interdependent and produces the best joint outcome (Van de Vliert, Nauta, Euwema & Janssen 1997). Approaches that are more aggressive, competitive, and negatively interdependent tend to result in less positive outcomes (Janssen et al 1999).

The weakness of the “one best way” view is that it does not provide evidence that collaboration produces the best outcome in all conflicts (Thomas 1992). It also does not explain how people are to overcome predispositions towards other approaches to conflict (Speakman & Ryal 2010). Van de Vliert et al (1997) point out that this perspective fails to consider how the passage of time, the altering of behaviour during conflict, or the effect of previous encounters might impact the current experience of conflict.

#### *6.3.3.4 The contingency or situational perspective*

In this view, the optimal approach for managing the conflict depends on the nature and context of any conflict. The most appropriate way to approach the conflict in one situation may not be appropriate in a different situation (Thomas 1992). Different approaches will produce different outcomes. For example, the use of a competitive approach by a party is likely to result in their needs being met. The use of an accommodating approach will not result in their needs being met, but will result in a stronger relationship because of its concession to the needs of the other party. A compromise might be most expedient where parties are committed to mutually exclusive goals and some kind of a fair settlement is desired.

The interplay between one party’s needs and the other party’s needs or between quality of outcome and quality of relationship points to the suitability of different approaches to different kinds of conflicts. For example, when one is buying a house, the primary concern for both the buyer and seller relates to the best outcome for them in terms of price. The relationship has little importance because there it is limited to the duration of a single transaction. In such a situation a competitive approach to the conflict is optimal and is actually expected. If one is making a decision with one’s spouse over what genre of film to hire on DVD, a highly competitive approach would be unsuitable because the relationship is more important than one’s own needs or the outcome. In such a situation one might accommodate and give the other party what they want in order to strengthen the relationship. Conflicts where the issue is trivial and the relationship unimportant are best avoided. In certain conflicts, where parties are committed to mutually exclusive goals, compromise is the only possibility. In situations where the outcome and the relationship are

important, and where the needs of both parties cannot be compromised, a collaborative approach produces the best solutions.

The conflict between South Africans and foreign migrants falls into this latter category. Relationships are important because the parties need to be able to live alongside each other in communities; the outcomes are important because both parties need to find ways to participate in the economy. More than this, both groups are likely to have knowledge and skills that would be useful in a process of generating options for resolving the conflict.

#### *6.3.3.5 The complexity or conglomerated approach*

The complexity perspective notes the dynamic, multi-dimensional nature of conflict and argues that the best approach to conflict may vary within any one conflict episode and between conflict episodes (Medina et al 2004; Nicotera 1993). Since conflict is continuous and multi-layered (Pondy 1992a), reactions to conflict will involve a mixture of all of the behavioural approaches to conflict rather than a single approach (Van de Vliert et al 1997).

From the perspective of the complexity perspective, a collaborative approach might be taken for many of the issues that arise as a result of conflict between South Africans and foreign migrants, for the reasons mentioned above. However, with certain issues, such as illegal access to social assistance, criminal activity a more competitive approach in which compliance is compelled would be taken. At the same time there might also be issues where avoidance, accommodation or compromise are utilised.

The danger is that to the extent that the conflict between South Africans and foreign migrants is conceived of as a zero-sum distributive conflict, it will evoke a highly competitive win/lose approach that is not optimum for a conflict where the relationship is important and where the possibility might exist of satisfying the needs of both parties.

#### **6.3.4 Contextual issues that shape approaches to conflict**

Three contextual factors have been identified that interact with Thomas' (1983) dual behavioural orientations to influence the choice of conflict handling strategy (Callanan, Benzing & Perri 2006). Callanan et al (2006) found that people were highly likely to adopt a particular approach based on these situational variables. Between 81% and 92% of the participants in their study chose strategies to deal with conflict based on the context rather than what psychometric instruments had shown to be their predisposition.

#### 6.3.4.1 *How critical is the central issue in the conflict?*

This question relates to the importance or impact of an issue on those involved in a conflict (Thomas 1983; Jameson 1999). How high are the stakes (Musser 1982)? Callanan et al (2006:274) describe criticality as the relative importance of an issue that produces conflict, either in terms of its impact on the parties, or its material effect, and as a function of time pressure or constraints that impact processes for resolution. The more critical or important an issue is, the greater the degree of assertiveness with which the conflict will be approached (Thomas 1983).

The perceived issues in the conflict between South Africans and foreign migrants are issues related to safety and security, economic threat, and survival. They represent the most basic and critical of human needs. They are therefore likely to evoke a competitive approach to the conflict, in which the 'enemy' is defeated.

#### 6.3.4.2 *How significant is the difference in power or status between the parties?*

"Status inequality" and "power imbalances" are identified in research as factors that shape the nature of conflict and determine conflict handling behaviour (Jameson 1999; Wall & Callister 1995). To the extent one perceives the other party's power to be low and one's own power to be high there is a tendency to adopt a competitive approach to the conflict. Conversely, perceptions that one's own power or status is low relative to the power of the other party will lead to accommodative behaviour (Callanan et al 2006).

The manner in which state discourse has placed foreign migrants in a position of vulnerability, along with the culture of impunity that surrounds violent protests, creates a perception of relative powerlessness. It is not specifically that they are specifically foreign that is the problem; it is rather that their lack of power invites a highly competitive strategy to remove them as competitors. This could explain why white foreigners have not been attacked in the same way that black foreigners have been attacked. They are not perceived to be powerlessness, in fact they might be perceived as relatively powerful, leading to conflict responses of avoiding or accommodating. This explanation was explicit in my conversation with one co-researcher:

*Hlonelwa: It's difficult to take out that frustration on white people because white people have been there, they've been part of your lives, you're used to them now. Whether you like it or not they are there. It's always been a frustration, but we've been conditioned to*

*accept it as part of our lives. Whereas with foreign nationals, it's like it's still new and there are no rules, and we can really take out centuries of frustration on them.*

#### *6.3.4.3 How are the other party's intentions perceived?*

A final factor which influences the approach taken to conflict is the extent to which aggressive intent is attributed to the other party. In conflict, narratives emerge that attribute aggressive or non-aggressive intentions to the other party. These stories play a critical role in shaping each party's reactions to the other party, and whether these reactions are hostile or involve retaliation. Perceived aggression tends to elicit anger and retribution (Thomas & Pondy 1977).

When one reflects on the intentions attributed to foreigners in popular discourse the choice of strategy becomes clear. They are flooding over South Africa's borders; a human tsunami threatens to engulf its already impoverished communities. They are either here as criminals, as drug dealers and fraudsters, or they are here to 'steal' jobs, houses, social grants and women. Once these characteristics are attributed to foreigners, an aggressive, competitive approach becomes inevitable.

With regard to these contextual issues that shape the course of conflict, responses to conflict are driven by perceptions (Callanan et al 2006; Thomas & Pondy 1997). The stories people tell themselves determine the way they approach a conflict. Again, it does not matter whether these stories are 'true' or not. They construct our reality; they define the problem. This is why investigating the violence against foreigners as an issue of the discursive construction of meaning offers insights and possibilities for solving the problem that are absent from much anti-xenophobic discourse. A different problem story invites those affected by the problem to approach the problem in different ways, perhaps to even acknowledge that it is a problem for the first time. This can lead to different and unexpected outcomes.

#### **6.3.5 Self-interest and self-betrayal**

When people's interests are threatened, and the issues are critical, they tend to pursue what's best for themselves rather than think about what's equally good for the other party. The Arbinger Institute (2002) argues that when this happens, certain behaviour and attitudes arise as a consequence. People's beliefs about themselves and others become distorted. When the other person or party is viewed as an object, whose needs are

secondary and less legitimate this results in unethical or destructive behaviour towards them.

The Arbinger Institute (2002) further argues that aggressive or destructive behaviour in conflict arises from self-deception, which is the product of “self-betrayal”. When an individual has some awareness of the needs of another person but still acts selfishly, this constitutes an act of self-betrayal. Self-betrayal therefore refers to actions that are contrary to what people feel they should do in relation to others. When people act in a manner that is contrary to what they believe is good or noble they need to account for this in some way. The behaviour that results from self-betrayal is justified by directing attention to the faults of the other party, blaming them, and making claims of victimhood (Pienaar 2009:137).

The significance of Arbinger’s insights for this study is that they offer an explanation for the negative sentiments expressed towards foreigners as a product of self-betrayal within a conflict situation.

### **6.3.6 Reflections on the conflict between South Africans and foreigners**

The personal stories described in this research suggest that the presence of foreigners in poor communities is being understood in terms of a distributive, zero-sum conflict where some kind of competitive action is needed by locals to protect their ‘space in the house’. The criticality of the issues, perceptions of negative intent on the part of foreigners, and the relative powerlessness of certain foreigners combine to promote a highly competitive response which attempts to resolve the conflict through the use of force. It could be argued that the culture of violence described earlier in this research further predisposes South Africans to a competitive approach to conflict. The result is a violation of human rights expressed in ugly violence against particularly vulnerable members of communities. This competitive response results in an escalation of the conflict, damage to the relationship between the parties, and an obscuring or marginalising of the problems that need to be solved.

Approaches to the issue that reflect anti-xenophobia discourse are equally unattractive as solutions. These range from avoidance to accommodation. While commendable in their intent, when viewed from a conflict perspective, campaigns like “Say no to Xenophobia” or “We are all Africans” represent a fundamental denial of the actual issues that underlie the

violence against foreigners. The appeal that African countries were hospitable to South Africans in exile during the struggle and therefore South Africans should be hospitable to Africans living within its borders is effectively an appeal for accommodation. South Africans should surrender their aspirations and needs as a kind of *quid pro quo* for past hospitality. Apart from the flawed reasoning behind such proposals, they do not address the problems revealed by the conflict and they do not seem to provide narratives that are compelling enough to shape new meanings in relation to the presence of foreigners in South Africa.

Both the competitive/defeat mode of engagement taken by certain South Africans, and the avoid/accommodate mode of engagement encouraged in anti-xenophobia discourse produce dysfunctional conflict. Not only are relationships damaged by the conflict, but these approaches offer little in terms of solutions. Both approaches obscure important problems within the context by trying to solve a complex problem by over-simplifying it and then blaming one of the parties for the problem. Viewing foreigners as the problem, or xenophobes as the problem (or both) only elicits resistance from the accused party, along with attempts to defend their actions with some kind of factual accounting.

My intention in this section has been to show how a “conflict story” is at least an equally plausible narrative for the violence against foreign migrants in South Africa. It has further advantages in its simplicity, openness to context, and potential to generate solutions in a way that the deployment of a reified notion of xenophobia does not. The possibilities that exist for an integrative, collaborative approach to this conflict will be explored in the following chapter.

This narrative of conflict, based on a transversal interdisciplinary dialogue with organisational conflict theories, does not fully explain how meaning is being constructed at a group/social levels, or adequately explain the conflict as a political phenomenon. Korsgaard et al (2008) highlight the need to better understand the process of collective sense-making in intergroup conflicts. The poststructuralist political theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and its subsequent development by each of them, will be used to describe the construction of meaning in social conflict.

## 6.4 Antagonism: A trajectory of the politics of difference

My choice of Laclau and Mouffe's poststructuralist political theory is informed by its sensitivity to conflict and struggle over meaning and identity within society (Boon 2014). Their work shares the social constructionist assumptions of this research, and their application of Foucault's discourse theory to politics shares the concern of this research with language and meaning.

Prior to conducting the research I was not familiar with the work of Laclau and Mouffe. I was introduced to their thought near the end of the research process by an article on social and political conflict. My reading of Laclau and Mouffe convinced me that their political theory was valuable for understanding the violence against foreigners in South Africa. It provided key insights into the construction of meaning in relation to foreigners in South Africa. Reviewing the literature on xenophobia in South Africa, I was astonished to find no reference to their work on hegemony, Laclau's work on political populism, or Mouffe's work on radical democracy in any of the academic literature<sup>11</sup>.

Murray (2010:461) locates the work of Laclau and Mouffe within the challenge for radical political theorists, "to develop forms of action and organisation that account for the specificity of diverse local struggles and promote the free transformation of individual and collective subjectivities through political action". Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) original collaboration, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (HSS)* begins with what they term the "crisis of the left" (1985:2). Traditional left wing political models seemed unable to make sense of the social and political landscape of the 1980's, in which neo-liberal economic policies and social conservatism seemed to be in the ascendancy. Conventional Marxist theory was unable to account for the proliferation of multiple social movements and struggles, whether these were for women's rights, the environment, gay rights, or the rights of ethnic minorities. This "proliferation of particularisms" created problems for the manner in which Marxism had privileged the working class (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:2).

They abandon the Marxist notion of core economic identities in favour of identities that are the product of Discourse<sup>12</sup>. For Laclau and Mouffe politics is, "a practice of creation,

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<sup>11</sup> The only reference I found, from extensive reading of literature published from the late 1990's to the present, was Mosselson's use of Mouffe as a secondary source for the thought of Carl Schmitt (Mosselson 2010:643).

<sup>12</sup> For the sake of continuity with Alvesson and Kärreman's (2000) distinction between (D)iscourse and (d)iscourse, introduced in the previous chapter, I shall continue to refer to discourse as prevailing systems of meaning as "Discourse", and discourse as everyday conversation and action as "discourse".

reproduction and transformation of social relations” (1985:153). Political identities are not things that exist in and of themselves, they are constituted and moulded by conflict within society. Politics does not simply reflect interests that already exist in society, it shapes political subjectivities.

Predetermined political identities or interests do not exist. They emerge as people mobilise themselves around Discourses that are presented in society as metaphors or tropes. Their notion of Discourse extends beyond ideas and speech to the way that political identities are constructed through open-ended chains of signification.

Mouffe explains:

Reality is not given to us; meaning is always constructed. There is no meaning that is just essentially given to us; there is no essence of the social, it is always constructed. The social is always the result of a hegemonic articulation; every type of social order is the product of a hegemony as a specific political articulation (in Carpentier & Cammaerts 2006:967).

Laclau and Mouffe acknowledge that material objects have a physical reality that is independent of Discourse. However, the meanings associated with these are only available through Discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 1990).

This section will explore Laclau and Mouffe’s notions of hegemony and antagonism, as well as Mouffe’s proposal for radical democracy. While Laclau and Mouffe are often referred to as a unit, their work has moved in different directions subsequent to the publication of *HSS*. Laclau has focused on developing his notion of hegemony, while Mouffe has focused on developing her theory of radical democracy (Wenman 2003).

#### **6.4.1 A poststructuralist critique of the political**

Laclau and Mouffe’s critique arises from the thought of de Saussure, and particularly from the post-structuralism of Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan. This is seen in their description of Discourse as an articulation of linguistic and non-linguistic elements in “a differential and structured system of positions” (1985:108). Their notion of Discourse involves an adaptation of de Saussure’s notion of semantic value (1985:106, 112–13). According to de Saussure, words are signs in a system of language that do not reference reality, but relate to other signs within the same system. Meaning is produced through the relationship between the “signifier” and “signified” and not through some external reference. The meaning of any word (or signifier) arises from its negative relationship to that which it is not.

Meaning is dependent upon *difference* (Laclau 1998). A radical critique of essentialist understandings of social identity (such as the class identities of Marxism) emerges from this understanding of language because, within such an understanding, all social identities are regarded as relational (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:115).

Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of identity is derived from Derrida's notion of identity as relational, and as based on a "constitutive outside" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Mouffe 2005:15). Their work reflects a notion of identity that combines elements of post-structuralism and Lacan's (1977) psychoanalysis, in which identity is always constituted in relation to an "Other". The other is needed for an identity to be constructed, but its presence simultaneously prevents identity from ever being fully constituted. As a result, the "constitutive outside" is both the precondition of, and the unavoidable obstacle to, the construction of identity (Wenman 2003).

Laclau (1990:21) explains this further, "What one gets is a field of simply relational identities which never manage to constitute themselves fully, since relations do not form a closed system". Instead of a fully constituted identity there is an inherent antagonism between the presence given to an identity and the absence or "Other" that "blocks" the full constitution of the identity to which it is opposed and thus shows its contingency" (Laclau 1990:21).

Social identities are therefore contingent identifications in which people consciously or unconsciously take up subject positions within a semi-structured field of differences. Identity is a form of differentiation in which any subject position (man, woman, worker, etc.) derives its meaning from both its association with and its difference from other elements within that field. Furthermore, since identities have no ultimate necessity, they are subject to continuous flux as combinations of elements bring about changes in meaning. In this way social identity has an "ambiguous, incomplete and polysemical character" (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:121).

Discourses order social life because they stabilise meaning temporarily and in so doing they render social and physical realities meaningful (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000). They temporarily position social identities and meaning in a relational system of signification (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). While Discourses make meaning possible, they are always undermined by the multiple possibilities that exist for interpretation. As a result they are always contingent and can never achieve complete closure. They are historically

contingent, provisional descriptions of social reality that can be destabilised and changed (Renner 2014).

This openness to destabilisation is important for Laclau and Mouffe. They describe the destabilisation or failure of a discursive structure as its *dislocation* (Laclau 1990:39-45). Dislocation occurs when a prevailing discursive formation cannot accommodate or make sense of new events or experiences. A crisis of meaning is precipitated. Discourses are challenged by the articulation of other Discourses that challenge constructions and offer alternative interpretations of the world. The political arises in this process of dislocation, as prevailing meanings are challenged and new identities created (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:131; Laclau 1990).

Laclau (1990:27) describes this as follows, “What we always find is a limited and given situation in which objectivity is partially constituted and also partially threatened; and in which the boundaries between the contingent and the necessary are constantly displaced”. Identity arises within this antagonistic relationship between what is constructed as reality and what threatens that construction of reality (Laclau 1990).

Applying this aspect of Laclau and Mouffe’s model to the narratives of the co-researchers recorded in this research, it is possible to describe unmet expectations that arose after 1994 in terms of dislocation and a crisis of meaning. Post-1994 Discourses of the “rainbow nation” (Gish 2004), “reconciliation” (Renner 2014), and “a better life for all” (ANC 1999, 2004, 2009) have become inadequate for making sense of life in South Africa. The promise of “a better life for all” has been reiterated in successive ANC election manifestos from 1994 to 2014. However, as pointed out in chapter 4, despite considerable progress achieved by the government this better life remains elusive for many poor South Africans. The result of this dislocation is seen in hegemonic struggles between prevailing Discourses and new Discourses that have emerged as a consequence of this crisis of meaning.

## **6.4.2 Hegemonic struggles and the production of meaning**

### *6.4.2.1 Hegemony and the Other*

Based on a reworking of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe argue that politics should be understood in terms of hegemonic struggles over meaning and identity within a context of competing political demands. When discursive structures experience dislocation, they are reorganised by social processes which Laclau and Mouffe call

hegemonic struggles. These are articulatory practices that attempt to build a new Discourse by offering new signifiers (referred to as empty signifiers) and positioning them within a Discourse so that they have a unifying effect that brings various Discourses together in a new hegemonic Discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:135-142). Hegemonic practices are the means by which competing groups in society attempt to construct new collective identities based on widespread acceptance of the “concrete demands” of that group (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:120).

The articulation of a hegemonic Discourse takes place within a context of competing Discourses, with the result that the claims of a hegemonic Discourse are premised on the simultaneous exclusion of meanings that are opposed to the empty signifier. Hegemony is created by the construction of a threat. The “constitutive outside” is the force that stabilises the hegemonic Discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Thomassen 2005). It is the presence of a threatening ‘Other’ that gives a hegemonic discourse stability, while at the same time preventing its ultimate closure (Torfinn 2005:15). The ultimate goal of hegemonic practices is an impossible one, and as a result any particular hegemonic formation will encounter “frontier effects” with other hegemonic Discourses (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:135–6).

#### *6.4.2.2 Hegemony and the empty signifier*

Every single Discourse is created and organised around a nodal point that represents some social ideal. Constructed ideals such as ‘justice’, ‘prosperity’, or ‘equality’ function as anchors; they temporarily stabilise a Discourse, and in so doing they also temporarily stabilise other units of meaning in relation to that Discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). These nodal points consist of what Laclau terms empty signifiers or empty universals. These are signifiers that represent vague but powerful social ideals that have normative appeal despite their equivocal meaning (Renner 2014). Empty universals derive their authority because they represent opposition and resistance towards current, negative circumstances in a particular society. The positive meaning of an empty universal is elusive and it is more easily understood in relation to what it opposes. Laclau (1996:53) explains that “it will always show itself through the presence of its Absence”.

Nodal points, such as these, function as reference points within a Discourse that “bind together a particular system of meaning or ‘chain of signification”” (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:8). The empty universal is able to do this because it has a relation of semantic

equivalence with other signifiers in the Discourse and binds them together in a chain of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

An experience of dislocation creates an urgent need for the creation of new empty signifiers that reorganise the Discourse and stabilise the meaning of other signifiers as they are bound to the empty signifier by means of chains of equivalence. Structural dislocation generates the need to rearrange the social around new empty signifiers, thereby making social change possible (Renner 2014). Laclau argues that the contingency that exists with regard to the creation of a future social order means that dislocation brings about possibility and freedom. It generates “a set of new possibilities for historical action which are the direct result of structural dislocation. The world is less ‘given’ and must be increasingly constructed” (Laclau 1990:40).

Renner (2014) argues that the term “reconciliation” emerged as an empty signifier during South Africa’s transition from apartheid. It was “a vague yet powerful social ideal, that could be embraced by the antagonistic parties of the ANC and NP not because of any intrinsic value, but rather because of its vagueness and semantic flexibility” (Renner 2014:263). It produced a contingent reconciliation Discourse, based on the claims of the various political protagonists, that was then stabilised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Empty universals hold populist appeal because of their promise to “fill the gap” between the experience of dislocation, and its crisis of meaning, and the need for a unified and fulfilled identity (Laclau 1996).

#### *6.4.2.3 Hegemony and the production of meaning*

Wenman (2003) describes how the distinctions made in semiotic theory between discursive tropes such as metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche are used by Laclau and Mouffe to explain the nature of hegemony, and the way in which each of them have developed different theories of hegemony since the publication of *HSS*.

Laclau and Mouffe follow Lacan’s proposal that metaphor and metonymy are the two fundamental tropes in the “signifying function”, or production of meaning. For Lacan, metaphor is the capacity of one signifier to replace another. Metonymy refers to a “word to word connection” in which there is contiguity or the combination of signifiers (Lacan 1977:156-157). According to the Oxford Dictionary (Soanes & Stevenson (eds) 2006), metonymy is where a word or expression is used as a substitute for something with which it

is closely associated. The practice of hegemony is described as a process of symbolic representation that begins with metonymy, moves to metaphorical substitution, and results in a decisive operation of synecdoche (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Synecdoche is where a part is used to represent the whole, or vice-versa.

The process of hegemonic articulation can be viewed in three interwoven stages. In the first stage a signifier is harnessed to refer to a possible future state that is more desirable than the current state (*metonymy*). Renner (2014:269) points out that, “What makes one particular signifier credible as a potential empty signifier is its signification of a constitutive lack, something which is absent but seems highly desirable in the present”. This signifier must be clear enough to be a motivational force, but vague enough to accommodate a variety of meanings and political claims. It must also represent something that multiple groups regard as desirable so that it can be used in a general way to represent their political claims (*metaphorical substitution*). This universalisation of the empty signifier leads to the exclusion of competing meanings and claims. The claims represented by the empty signifier are stabilised by antagonism towards competing claims, which are constructed as a radical “other”. In the final stage of the hegemonic process, the appeal of the empty signifier binds other discourses to it through chains of “equivalence” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). The result is the creation of a new discourse that is unified by the empty signifier and stabilised by the presence of the “other” (*synecdoche*).

The initial moment of metonymy creates a political frontier between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and this acts as a point of convergence at which people become unified in their antagonism towards ‘them’. A collective social identity replaces particular demands (Laclau 1990). The empty signifier stands in a relation of equivalence to other signifiers within the hegemonic Discourse and holds them together on the basis of similarities in identity and a common enemy. Hegemonic struggles create a frontier between the two groups; in Herschinger’s (2011:23) words they separate “a discursive space into two antagonistic camps – the good vs. the bad, the Self vs. the Other”.

#### *6.4.2.4 The production of meaning and foreigners in South Africa*

Hegemony occurs when the concrete demands of some social sector become an extension of its collective identity. The process described by Laclau and Mouffe can be observed with regard to the struggle of poor South Africans for economic freedom and the emerging freedom Discourse described in chapter 5.

1. There is an initial moment of metonymy in which an empty signifier is used to represent something with which it is associated. The signifier, 'freedom', is constructed in a way that represents the economic aspirations of poor South Africans. Freedom creates a political frontier between those who are not free (us) and those who are (them).
2. 'Freedom' as a metaphor becomes a point of convergence for a number of other, related, Discourses which unite people in their antagonism towards 'them'. To use Laclau and Mouffe's language, chains of equivalence link the various concrete political demands.
3. This is expressed in a synecdoche, where the part now stands for the whole. 'Freedom' now represents the various and multiple concrete demands of the collective political identity that has been created by the convergence of Discourses through chains of equivalence and stabilised by the empty universal, 'freedom'.

This hegemonic freedom Discourse creates antagonism towards those who are perceived to have freedom illegitimately, or to be obstacles to the attainment of freedom. 'Foreigners' is used to represent those who are among us, but do not belong because they are not indigenous. This creates a political frontier between indigenous people and those who have migrated to the community or country. 'Foreigners' as a metaphor, given the frontier that has constituted them as a threat, becomes something that connects a number of other narratives that are united in their perception of 'them' as a threat. They are particularly a threat because they are reaping the benefits of freedom that are still so elusive for 'us'. Frustration with foreigners becomes a focal point for the group identity that has been created by shared opposition to 'them' and carries with it all of the political demands that have been connected by means of chains of equivalence.

Laclau explains:

The presence of a frontier separating the oppressive regime from the rest of society is the very condition of the universalisation of the demands via equivalences. . . . However, the more extended the chain of equivalences, the more the need for a general equivalent representing the chain as a whole. The means of representation are, however, only the existing particularities. So one of them has to assume the representation of the chain as a whole. This is the strictly hegemonic move: the body of one particularity assumes a function of universal representation (the final moment of synecdoche: the part standing in for the whole) (Laclau, & Butler, Laclau, & Žižek 2000:302).

What is labelled as xenophobia can therefore also be described as the articulation of a hegemonic Discourse. The extreme poverty experienced by many South Africans has created a crisis of meaning. Their expectations of change, following the transition to democracy in 1994, have not been met; they have not experienced the promised “better life for all”. The crisis of this dislocation, and the anger it has precipitated can be seen in violent protests over service delivery and in the emergence of radical political parties on the radical left, such as the Economic Freedom Fighters. The term ‘freedom’ is harnessed as an empty universal whose meaning can be shaped so that it describes the economic participation and consumption that was understood to be promised by a new political dispensation, but which has not been delivered. Freedom, thus understood, becomes a unifying point for other Discourses on displacement, identity, entitlement, and comparison with those who display the identity markers of this construal of freedom. The various narratives representing the concrete political demands of the group are through a chain of equivalence that is unified and stabilised by the signifier ‘freedom’.

A new collective identity is formed among those who are not yet free. This creates a frontier of antagonism towards ‘them’: those who have freedom, but who have gained it illegitimately, the usurpers. Within the South African context, this ‘Other’ is certainly white South Africans, who are often referred to as settlers, thereby constructing them as foreigners. This construction of the ‘Other’ is seen clearly in discourses on economic freedom emanating from political parties such as the EFF. However, I would argue that within the chains of equivalence that unite the various political demands of the poor around the empty signifier of ‘freedom’, a link extends to foreign nationals from other parts of Africa. My basis for this is that in the stories of co-researchers, the discourses presented to explain their frustration at foreigners are synonymous with the discourses that represent the various political demands made with respect to freedom. The issues are the same. In such a context it becomes easier to direct antagonism at the group that lives in close proximity and is relatively powerless.

‘They’ become a convenient scapegoat in elite leadership discourse. ‘They’ are presented as the reason for the existence of so much un-freedom among a population who should be free. As the legitimacy of their existence and economic prosperity is questioned, an autochthonous Discourse on national subjectivity is used to justify the rejection of foreigners. The *amakwerekwere* are an obstacle to freedom. In a context of dysfunctional local leadership, where violent communal struggle is viewed as a legitimate political tool, it

is not difficult for opportunistic local leaders to invoke this discourse of the other to further their own political and economic agendas.

Perhaps it has been a mistake to think of the economic rationale behind the violence against foreigners in terms of relative deprivation theory. While research has partially confirmed the role of relative deprivation, this exploration of discourses on foreigners suggests that the broader economic issue of economic freedom plays an important role and that it is the comparison of the haves and have-nots in terms of this construct of economic freedom that explains growing levels of discontent in South African society.

#### *6.4.2.5 Hegemony and political struggle*

Hegemonic struggles are not planned strategies; they emerge as new combinations of political demands create a new discourse that has some social ideal at its centre (Torfing 2005). Hegemonic struggles become evident when a set of political claims, unified around an empty signifier, compete with another set of political claims. Hegemony occurs when the one set of claims is marginalised or excluded by the other. Hegemony is never final or total and there are always possibilities of re-articulations. As a result, the social is structurally open and contingent even though it reflects a somewhat rigid hegemonic nature (Mouffe in Carpentier & Cammaerts 2006).

Wenman argues that the way they understand the operation of synecdoche is critical for understanding the difference between Laclau and Mouffe:

This is because for Laclau hegemony is *intrinsically* a threefold process of symbolic representation that moves from an initial moment of metonymy to metaphoric substitution and then to a decisive (although necessarily incomplete) synecdoche: the part standing in for the whole. Whereas for Mouffe the *sine qua non* of radical democratic hegemony is the exclusion of synecdoche: the exclusion of *any* part standing in for, or attempting to stand in for, the whole (Wenman 2003:584).

This is important for Mouffe because, as we shall see later, her aim is to accommodate pluralism, and the intrinsically antagonistic nature of politics, in her model of radical democracy.

An examination of Laclau and Mouffe's notion of antagonism will further illustrate the potential of their political theory to illuminate the violence against foreigners in South Africa.

### 6.4.3 Antagonism

Mouffe argues that, “Liberalism’s individualism means it cannot understand the formation of collective identities. Yet the political is from the outset concerned with collective forms of identification; the political always has to do with the formation of an ‘Us’ as opposed to a ‘Them’, with conflict and antagonism . . .” (Mouffe 2002:5). The political consists of public, collective action and aims at the construction of a “we” in a context of conflict and difference. In order for a “we” to be constructed a frontier must be established that separates us from “them”, thereby constituting “them” as an enemy (Mouffe 1993:69). The constitution of identity in relation to an outside group, as an ontological condition of identity formation, makes antagonism a “permanent possibility” in society (Legget 2013).

The view, common to various poststructuralist approaches, that a constitutive outside or “surplus” always remains in any social or symbolic field is important for Laclau and Mouffe’s political theory (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Mouffe 2000:4; Martin 2005). Laclau and Mouffe (1985) understand this surplus as antagonism. Antagonism is: “the presence of the Other [that] prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution”. To the extent that antagonism exists, “I cannot be a full presence for myself” (1985: 125). Antagonism is not opposition that arises from differences of opinion. Antagonism has “an *ontological* dimension: it imposes a limit on intrinsically polysemic social identities, furnishing them, however temporarily, with a sense of objectivity and potential coherence” (Martin 2005:146).

Antagonisms shape our experience of the world. They delineate what we identify as ‘us’ from what is ‘other’ by asserting principles of difference that create ‘us’ in terms of what we are not. In this way they impose limits on the discursive elements through which identities are constructed and bring a sense of unity and coherence to who we think ‘we’ are. They also reveal social identities to be incomplete and fragile because of their dependence on the exclusionary limit of an ‘Other’ for coherence and unity (Martin 2005).

Martin argues that the ‘Other’ can be people (foreigners), an idea (capitalism), an object (Ebola) or any perceived threat. He writes,

What is fundamental is that we identify it as a threat to destroy or undermine us, perhaps to ‘steal’ from us our integral identity and undermine the very basis of social order. Hence we find antagonisms producing in their wake a whole variety of mythical associations with excess: evil, impurity, uncontrollable desire and so on. As Laclau points out, it is because antagonism is the ‘limit of all objectivity’ that it

cannot be conceived simply as another difference and represented neutrally. As a universal and total threat, the enemy is likely to take on a caricatured representation, symbolising as it does the total annihilation of meaning and order (Martin 2005:152).

The 'Other' simultaneously threatens us and creates a sense of unity for 'us' as it draws various Discourses together and aligns them against the 'Other' through a "logic of equivalence" based on unmet political demands (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Wenman 2003).

That relationships between 'us' and 'them' are necessarily antagonistic has been disputed (Knops 2007; Erman 2009). Laclau and Mouffe have responded to this in later work that moves beyond antagonism as the exclusive key to identity formation and develops a wider concept of negativity in which the symbolic exclusion of antagonism is displaced onto a range of human experience (Wenman 2003; Martin 2005).

#### **6.4.4 Mouffe: Agonism and radical democracy**

##### *6.4.4.1 Ineffaceable conflict and the role of passions*

Mouffe (2014:150) argues that "it is only when the ineradicable character of division and antagonism is recognised that it is possible to think in a properly political manner and to face the challenge confronting democratic politics". She asserts that "The political in its antagonistic dimension cannot be made to disappear simply by denying it, by wishing it away: such a negation only leads to impotence; and liberal thought *is* impotent when confronted by antagonisms which it believes belong to a bygone age when reason did not control . . . passions" (Mouffe 2002:5, emphasis in original). Power and conflict are therefore ineradicable features of society. Attempts to remove them by ignoring difference or forcing consensus will rely on authoritarianism and oppression.

Mouffe recognises the important role of "passions" in the creation of collective political identities. She argues that "one cannot understand democratic politics without acknowledging passions as the moving force in the field of politics" (Mouffe 2002:8). She distinguishes between emotions and passions and argues that the notion of emotions, as an individual experience, is inadequate for dealing with collective identities. She prefers the more violent term, passions because it is able to accommodate the dimensions of conflict and confrontation between collective political identities that she regards as constitutive of the political (Mouffe 2014:149).

#### 6.4.4.2 *Antagonism and hegemony*

Mouffe (2000) locates antagonism in sources beyond collective identity in her later work. She argues that the plurality of values in society will inevitably result in antagonism. More significantly, Mouffe (2000) distinguishes between the liberal and democratic traditions in politics, and argues that these traditions result in an antagonism between two competing logics. The liberal tradition focuses on the rule of law, the protection of human rights and the respect of human liberty. The democratic tradition focuses on equality and the relationship between the governed and those who govern. There is conflict inherent in the relationship between the principles of liberty and equality. They can be held together in some kind of fragile, symbolic connection through temporary hegemonic articulations, but “there is no way that they could be perfectly reconciled” (Mouffe 2000:5).

Mouffe’s location of antagonism in the interplay between equality and freedom is particularly relevant for the South African political context. A struggle for various constructions of freedom and equality define our political landscape. The quest for equality is reflected in initiatives such as employment equity, Black Economic Empowerment, and attempts at land reform that seek to overcome South Africa’s history of structural inequality. However, this pursuit of equality can impinge on liberty, and the constitutional clauses that defend certain freedoms and rights. Reddy (2012:3) describes these tensions in the introduction to his analysis of what he describes as xenophobic violence in South Africa, “the elite in the society operate within an idiom of rights, and the mass of poor, radical resource distribution”. The elite stress the right to liberty, while the poor cry for equality.

South Africa’s constitution, one of the most liberal in the world, stands in opposition to the socialist and Marxist notions of equality that were foundational to the struggle against apartheid. The political structures generated by the ANC’s attempt to retain its popular appeal as a liberation movement are in conflict with the neo-liberal economic and political policies it has adopted in order to secure inflows of investment capital. The result of these tensions is a highly precarious hegemonic articulation of freedom and equality that seems unable to deliver either in a meaningful way.

In Mouffe’s later work hegemony is not the association of some group in society with various political demands. Hegemony arises from the temporary stabilisation of the signifiers of liberty and equality within a particular context. The struggle to stabilise the contradictory logics of liberty and equality always establishes the hegemony of some

“political force” (Mouffe 2000:5). Hegemony remains a process of symbolic representation that begins with a moment of metonymy, but does not move to synecdoche as it does with Laclau (Mouffe 2000; Wenman 2003).

Mouffe (2009:549) argues that accepting the unresolvable nature of the political necessitates “recognizing the hegemonic nature of every kind of social order and envisaging society as the product of a series of practices whose aim is to establish order in a context of contingency”. Hegemonic practices become the means by which a social order is created and the meanings of social institutions are fixed.

#### *6.4.4.3 Agonism*

Since, for Mouffe, the political is constituted by conflict, conflict cannot be eliminated by forcing consensus. Rather, appropriate and legitimate channels, in which competing claims can be made need to be created and institutionalised. In her model of radical democracy, various identities are engaged in a struggle for hegemony as they exist alongside each other. However, rather than coexist as enemies that attempt to destroy one another, they coexist as adversaries that share a symbolic space in which there are certain rules. While antagonism can never be eradicated, in this way it can be domesticated (Legget 2003:304).

Within radical democracy, hostile antagonistic relations in society are transformed into agonistic relations. The view of the other as an enemy of antagonism is replaced by a view of the other as an adversary whose existence and claims are legitimate (Mouffe 1993 2000).

Mouffe builds on Schmitt’s (1976) concept of friend/enemy, but proceeds in a different direction to Schmitt<sup>13</sup>. Schmitt recognised the ineradicable presence of social conflicts that led people to define others as friends or enemies. Schmitt argued that liberal democracy is problematic because of an inherent contradiction he perceived between liberalism and democracy; a democracy that embraced pluralism was therefore not only practically impossible, but also dangerous. Pluralism causes conflict, and if pluralism was permitted the ensuing conflict would result in civil war. For Schmitt, the only solution to the antagonism that is intrinsic to society was to view those on the other side of antagonistic

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<sup>13</sup> Mouffe claims that neither she nor Laclau had read Schmitt before they wrote HSS, despite similarities in their description of the nature of the political and the antagonism inherent in it. She claims she discovered the points of similarity (and difference) when she read Schmitt’s work after the publication of HSS (Hansen & Sonnichsen 2014:267).

relationships as enemies. Mouffe agrees with Schmitt on the nature of the political, the weakness of liberalism because of its individualism, and the friend/enemy distinction, but disagrees with Schmitt's rejection of pluralism (Schmitt 1976; Mouffe in Hansen & Sonnichsen 2014:266).

Schmitt could not see how liberal democracy could “domesticate” enemies by transforming them into friendly adversaries (Mouffe 2000). However, Mouffe argues that it is the specific role of democratic politics to avoid the possibility of violent conflict by converting the enemy into the adversary, and transforming antagonism into “agonism” (Mouffe 2005:25).

Mouffe writes,

The novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/them opposition – which is an impossibility – but the different way in which it is established. . . . Envisaged from the point of view of ‘agonistic pluralism’, the aim of democratic politics is to construct the ‘them’ in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an ‘adversary’, that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question (Mouffe 2000:101–2).

#### 6.4.4.4 *The task of radical democracy*

Mouffe argues that the challenge of radical democracy is “to envisage a form of commonality strong enough to institute a ‘*demos*’ but nevertheless compatible with certain forms of pluralism: religious, moral and cultural pluralism, as well as a pluralism of political parties” (Mouffe (ed) 1999:50). The mission of radical democracy is to “create a common political identity among persons otherwise engaged in many different enterprises” (Mouffe 1993:67). This shared identity is derived from collective identification with a metaphor, it is “a recognition of our similarities – as radical democratic citizens – over and above the other differences we may have and *in order to* protect those differences” (Wenman 2003:599 emphasis in original).

In Mouffe’s agonistic model, democratic politics does not attempt to eradicate passions or relegate them to the private sphere in order to make rational consensus possible in the public sphere. Rather, democratic politics attempts to “tame” passions and mobilise them for democratic purposes (Mouffe 2002:9).

#### 6.4.5 Reflections on antagonism

Their work together in *HSS*, and the different directions taken by Laclau and Mouffe

subsequent to the publication of *HSS*, offer insights into the violence against foreigners in South Africa. Laclau's focus on hegemonic practices resulted in a study of the construction of meaning in political populism. His description of populist hegemonic Discourse offers insights that are helpful for understanding the creation of what has been termed xenophobic discourse, and for developing strategies to shape social discourse. Mouffe proposes a model of "agonistic democracy", as part of a broader project of "radical democracy"<sup>14</sup>. While it may fail in its ultimate aim of functioning as a meta-theory for democratic politics, is useful as a heuristic descriptive model. In this sense it may illuminate the relationship between indigenous South Africans and foreigners by providing a descriptive framework based on the notion of antagonism.

The ideas of both Laclau and Mouffe have been criticised, particularly where they have attempted to portray their work as normative rather than descriptive (Townshend 2004; Knopps 2007; Erman 2009). Zizek argues that Laclau's theory of hegemony relies on an "unreflected gap between the descriptive and the normative" (in Butler et al 2000:229).

Townshend's summary is helpful for its illumination of my own use of Laclau and Mouffe:

Some of the weaknesses of Laclau and Mouffe's position could have been avoided if they had made some tactical retreats through limiting the claims of their discourse theory – for example, by indicating that they were mainly attempting to deepen our understanding of the 'political' by exploring the nature of the ideological construction of political identities through the use of language and psychology, that they were concerned with the problem of 'meaning' rather than the truth claims of discourses, and that they were creating the 'ontological' conditions for classifying different types of *political* discourse (Townshend 2004:275).

Like Townshend, I am unconvinced by Laclau's and Mouffe's attempts to position their work as some kind of meta-theory. It is descriptive rather than normative, and describes how the social and political construct each other. In this sense I am using their notions of hegemony and Mouffe's agonistic democracy as analytical theories that illuminate the conflict between South Africans and foreigners. This usage avoids some of the weaknesses in radical democracy pointed out by Knopps (2007) and Erman (2009).

Laclau's and Mouffe's ideas offer an understanding of the violence against foreigners in South Africa as the product of Discourse/discourse rather than as a reified notion of

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<sup>14</sup> Mouffe clarifies that while radical democracy is a political project, agonistic democracy is an analytical theory that does not have any political content (Mouffe, in Hansen & Sonnichsen 2014:266).

xenophobia. The failure of democracy to deliver both equality and freedom has precipitated structural dislocation and a crisis of meaning. Hegemonic Discourses of the “rainbow nation”, “reconciliation”, and “a better life for all” have become inadequate for making sense of life in South Africa. This has resulted in the emergence of a new Discourse of freedom. As an empty signifier, freedom unites the various political demands of the poor through chains of equivalence. As people take up subject positions in the Discourse their construction of themselves as ‘not free’ creates a barrier between them and the free – this creates an ‘Other’. The other, as a constitutive outside stabilises the Discourse, but also prevents its closure.

The ‘Other’ includes white South Africans, and this is certainly expressed in Discourses on economic freedom. However, within an increasingly autochthonous Discourse on national subjectivity the ‘Other’, whether they are white South Africans or black foreign migrants, is being constructed as foreign. Freedom Discourse becomes increasingly anti-foreigner through chains of equivalence that links Discourses of identity, displacement, entitlement, and comparison with the signifier of freedom. The collective demands of the social group, represented by the empty signifier, become an extension of its collective identity. It is significant that the narratives presented by the co-researchers in this study coincide with the concrete political demands attached to freedom.

Within this broad designation of foreigners, one group lives in closer proximity, is relatively powerless, and while this groups might seem similar to them, this groups offence is that they are more free than local South Africans in a country where they have no right to this freedom. Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti’s (2012) findings, that violence occurred in communities with income inequality between the poorest people and those with an intermediary income, suggests that this is the case. It is difficult to accept that the repeated violence against foreign owned shops and foreign traders is accidental, nor is the narrative about lost jobs and economic opportunities. They suggest an economic motive for the attacks that cannot be explained by accusations of bigotry. The presence of these foreign nationals, who have transcended poverty in some way to attain freedom, accuses them in their state of un-freedom. This ‘Other’ simultaneously threatens us and creates a sense of unity for us. The result is communal violence against foreigners.

## 6.5 Reflections on this chapter

In presenting social identity theory, conflict theory, and Laclau and Mouffe's poststructuralist political theory as lenses on the violence against foreigners in South Africa my purpose is not to assimilate these perspectives, but rather to note the unique contribution of each as an expression of transversal rationality.

When one views the violence against foreigners as the production of political identities through the articulation of hegemonic discourse it illuminates the process by which meaning is being socially constructed. It answers the questions of "what constitutes a foreigner?" and "what do they mean for us?". This perspective explains the inherently antagonistic nature of the political, and this can be seen in terms of Laclau's discourse theory or the tension between freedom and equality described in Mouffe's theory of radical democracy.

When one views the violence as the product of conflict it respects the narratives of displacement, competition, and threat that are offered as explanations by the perpetrators of violence against foreigners. Rather than trying to convince them of the facts, an approach to the violence as conflict will open up possibilities for multiple problems to be addressed.

Further insights are generated when one views the violence as a product of group identity and prejudice. When prejudice is viewed as a means of claiming social power and shaping social realities rather than as irrational bigotry, the social context of the violence against foreigners is taken into account. As a means of claiming social power and advantage, prejudice functions as a justification for actions taken to solve problems in communities rather than as a set of unfounded and irrational beliefs about foreigners. Such an understanding of prejudice holds promise, because while strongly held beliefs may be resistant to change, problems can be identified and addressed. I will argue with Wetherell (2012) that structural change is required to confront and challenge prejudice.

By investigating the violence against foreigners in South Africa through these lenses, I hope that I have shown that a narrative of xenophobia is not the only explanation for it. I have presented an alternative story, where the dominant theme is conflict. There are doubtless other narratives that might explain it, but a narrative of the violence against foreigners as a conflict has many strengths:

- It is highly sensitive to context, both local context and the socio-historical South African context.
- It explains the creation of group identity around specific demands, and antagonistic relations towards the 'Other' that is perceived to impede the fulfilment of these demands.
- The articulation of a hegemonic discourse that represents these demands illuminates the construction of meaning with regard to foreigners in South Africa.
- The criticality of the issues explains the use of such a violent violent/competitive approach.
- Its explanation of the choice of targets in terms of their relative powerlessness rather than only their ethnicity explains why certain foreigners are not attacked.
- It explains the role of leaders at elite and local levels. Elite leaders scapegoat foreigners to account for their non-performance in honouring their promises and delivering services to meet the needs of South Africa's poor.
- At a local level, official leadership structures that are dysfunctional and the absence of appropriate conflict resolution mechanisms allow local leaders to harness the perceived threat of foreigners to mobilise people in order to further their own economic and political agendas.
- Prejudice against foreigners serves to legitimate the use of force to effect social change. The negative depictions of foreigners are deployed to account for violent behaviour and justify it, as much as they might also serve as a means to mobilise people to take action to solve the problem of foreigners.

Apart from these explanatory strengths, I will show that by introducing an alternative problem story one is able to approach the problem differently and discover different options for solving it. The possibilities for addressing the violence against foreigners that are generated by this transversal interdisciplinary study will be explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 7

### BEYOND XENOPHOBIA

#### 7.1 Introduction

The transversal interdisciplinary study in the previous chapter suggests various routes that could be taken to address violence against foreigners in South Africa. Prejudice can be challenged, conflict can be resolved, and antagonism can be overcome. This chapter will explore possibilities for these. While these options emerge from the study of a particular local context, they may be applicable beyond the local and offer insights into how similar violence might be addressed.

#### 7.2 Challenging prejudice

##### 7.2.1 Traditional approaches to reducing prejudice

There are a number of approaches to challenging prejudice that arise from the traditional understanding of prejudice as irrational thinking based on ignorance or the limits of cognitive processes. These include the Contact Hypothesis, education, decategorisation, and the creation of new superordinate group categories.

###### *7.2.1.1 Contact*

The Contact Hypothesis or Intergroup Contact Theory originated in the work of Allport (1954) and claims that that under certain conditions interpersonal contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members (Dovidio, Gaertner & Kawakami 2003).

The effectiveness of contact in reducing prejudice is contested. While a number of reviews show support for contact theory and suggest that intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice (Jackson 1993; Patchen 1999; Pettigrew 1986, 1998), other reviews reached more mixed conclusions (Amir 1976; Forbes 2004). There are also reviews that are critical of the Contact Hypothesis' claim to promote positive intergroup relationships and have challenged the research for a lack of sophistication and rigour, and argued that it

would not lead to a widespread reduction in prejudice (McClendon 1974; Hewstone & Brown 1986; Reicher 1986). Ford's (1986) review found support for the Contact Hypothesis to be at best "premature," and that the research presented in these papers was "...grossly insufficient in representing the various settings of daily life" (Ford 1986:256). Certain social psychologists have abandoned the contact theory altogether (Hopkins, Reicher & Levine 1997).

There are many dependent variables, apart from prejudice, in any situation of intergroup contact. These include anxiety, individual threat, collective threat, ingroup identification, perspective taking, outgroup knowledge, intergroup trust, forgiveness, empathy, and perceptions of outgroup variability (Pettigrew & Tropp 2011). All of these influence the effectiveness of contact in reducing prejudice. The South African context displays strong ingroup identification and high levels of threat and anxiety. These factors make contact unlikely to be instrumental in reducing violence against foreigners in South Africa.

It must also be noted that, unlike many social contexts where the effectiveness of contact as a means of reducing prejudice has been studied, in South Africa the ingroup and outgroup do not live in separate communities with very little contact occurring naturally. Foreigners and the South Africans who are hostile towards them have lived together as neighbours in communities for many years (Monson & Arian 2012; Misago 2012; Monson 2012). There is already significant contact between these groups in communities where violence against foreigners occurred, but this has not diminished hostility towards foreigners.

There are factors that diminish the effectiveness of contact in reducing prejudice. According to group threat theory, where a sizeable minority group lives close to the dominant group, and is perceived as an economic or political threat, intergroup contact does not reduce prejudice nor produce harmonious relationships (Blalock 1967; Glaser 1994; Dixon 2006). Also, where the intergroup relations caused anxiety because of their increased group threats and differences, this intensified negative and offensive responses by ingroup members to outgroup attempts to initiate conflict (Van Zomeren, Fischer & Spears 2007).

Even Allport understood that certain kinds of contact could actually reinforce stereotypes and negative attitudes. He described certain enabling conditions for contact—that it should be voluntary, be supported by authorities, that there should be equal status between the participants, and that it should be collaborative rather than competitive in nature and involve

the pursuit of common goals (Dovidio et al 2003; Forbes 1997; Pettigrew 1998). Intergroup contact is more likely to diminish prejudice when it is not superficial and when group salience is high (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner & Christ 2011:276). To the extent that contact meets all of these conditions it is effective in shaping attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006). Studies indicate that when contact takes place within intimate relationships such as friendship, it has the same positive effects as when Allport's conditions are met (Turner, Hewstone, Voci, Paolini & Christ 2007).

### *7.2.1.2 Education*

The benefits of education and accurate information in reducing prejudice are often stressed (Stephan & Stephan 1984; Dovidio & Gaertner 1999). Reicher (2012) points out that this is often accompanied by the suggestion that if this could be done with children before they are tainted with prejudice it would solve the problem.

Studies have been carried out on the effectiveness of education in reducing prejudice and have produced mixed findings. Case (2007) found that education increased awareness of prejudice, but did not reduce levels of prejudice. Other studies showed a reduction in prejudice compared to control groups (Springer, Palmer, Terenzini, Pascarella & Nora 1996; Hogan & Mallott 2005), or that although education does not eradicate prejudice it prevents it from increasing (Henderson, King & Kaleta 2000).

Attempts to 'cure' prejudice through education seem to be based on the assumption that it arises from ignorance or faulty thinking. If the origins of prejudice are to be found in intergroup relationships rather than the human psyche, the ability of education to eradicate prejudice is doubtful.

### *7.2.1.3 Decategorisation*

This approach to reducing prejudice attempts to create interactions in which people are seen as unique individuals through the exchange of intimate personal information (Brewer & Miller 1984). Personalisation is thought to result in reduced perceptions of intergroup difference by making group categories less useful, thus decreasing bias and prejudice.

A weakness of decategorisation is that it mitigates against the deployment of measures to address the consequences of racially based oppression and social injustice.

#### *7.2.1.4 New group categories*

Sherif's (1967) research showed that, in certain circumstances, the creation of a superordinate group identity can result in a shift from intergroup (us versus them) to intragroup (we) categories and lead to increased cooperation and decreased prejudice

This suggests that attempts to create new, inclusive group identities may be effective in reducing prejudice. New understandings of who 'we' are can lead to prejudice being identified as a problem and then efforts made to eliminate it. When people change the way they think about group memberships, and renegotiate the boundaries between groups, their reflexive awareness of prejudice may increase and they may embrace new understandings of who 'they' are and what they mean for us (Tajfel & Turner 1979; Nier Gaertner, Dovidio, Banker, Ward & Rust 2001).

#### *7.1.1.5 The effectiveness of these interventions*

Reicher argues that the way we understand and frame a problem and the way we solve it are interdependent (2012:27). Poor framing and understanding result in a lack of solutions.

The creation of new superordinate group identities offers promise for reducing prejudice. However, if the imposition of new identities is not to be resisted these must be negotiated by group members and provide the sense of belonging and positive self-regard created by social identities. I will argue that for new group identities to be effective in challenging prejudice they must also be the basis for collective action aimed at social transformation.

If prejudice was nothing more than hasty generalisations made on the basis of inadequate information, then contact, education, and decategorisation might be sufficient to eradicate it. However, their effectiveness is likely to be diminished to the extent that prejudice is not an expression of the inner world of individuals and arises out of interactions between groups. If prejudice is about claiming or maintaining social power it is more useful to ask how prejudice is being constructed to serve group purposes. What is taking place in societies where prejudice exists? What does the outgroup signify for the ingroup? What are the group interests that are served by prejudice?

Questions such as these point to possibilities for reducing prejudice that are more likely to be effective in the context of violence against foreigners in South Africa. These include new group categories, counter-mobilisation, and social change.

## 7.2.2 Counter-mobilisation

Reynolds et al (2012:63) point out that “just as group life is a basis for prejudice, so too is it the basis for collective and political action that can challenge and eliminate prejudice”. This means that categorisation and group processes are not only the basis of prejudice; they are also part of the solution.

If prejudice is something that is mobilised (Reicher 2012), strategies that deal with mistaken thinking in the prejudiced mind are inadequate. Strategies to deal with prejudice need to be based on counter-mobilisation. Addressing prejudice is a matter of collective action rather than individual cognition. Groups can be vehicles for resistance and social change as much as they can be used to maintain or strengthen the status quo.

Misago (2012) notes the role played by competent leaders to prevent violence in communities that were not affected by violence. While this illustrates the role of other leaders in fostering violence in attempts to solve local problems, it also suggests that the mobilisation of people by leaders to solve problems is possible. If such mobilisation induced people to collaborate to solve the social problems that affect them it would facilitate the kind of contact envisaged by Allport. It could also bring about change at the level where the challenges to prejudice is most robust – in the social and economic sphere.

## 7.2.3 Social change

The key to “smashing prejudice” is not psychological readjustment but social change (Reynolds et al 2012:50). As much as new group categories and counter-mobilisation offer possibilities for challenging prejudice in the context of violence against foreigners in South Africa, the narratives of co-researchers suggest that unless the precarious nature of their existence changes, animosity towards foreigners is unlikely to decrease.

The extreme poverty that many South Africans still experience intensifies their anxiety at the presence of competing social groups, and may justify the use of violence against them. The reality that the absence of social change lies behind the violence against foreigners is clearly reflected in the narratives of co-researchers. Service delivery failures in South Africa contribute to violence against foreigners because they constitute the continued marginalisation and deprivation of the poor. Tilly (2003) points out that there is more likely to be collective violence in low-capacity states – suggesting that diminished state capacity, whether it is caused by corruption or ineptitude, produces

violent protest. This violence is not only directed against the state, but also against groups of people whose presence represents a problem because of the way this is perceived to be the cause of ongoing poverty and deprivation.

The key to addressing violence against foreigners in South Africa is social change. Attempts to address the violence against foreigners in South Africa as xenophobia rather than as a product of skewed social and economic relations in society are unlikely to succeed because they evade the actual issues that require scrutiny and change. Individual mind sets, obnoxious personalities, and unchangeable cognitive biases do not prevent social and political change.

As Kerr and Durrheim (2013) point out, the deployment of anti-xenophobic discourse as the solution to the violence against foreigners obscures the social issues that precipitate it. Wetherell argues that the notion of prejudice is often harnessed for ideological purposes, “Accounting in terms of prejudice can draw attention away from immediate social reform towards utopian visions; it can provide a logic and a method for justifying individual conduct; and it can establish a positive identity and benevolent ‘vocabulary of motives’ *vis-a-vis* other, supposedly less enlightened, individuals” (2012:158). Accusations of prejudice function to simultaneously maintain technologies of privilege in South Africa and to silence the voices of the poor – and in so doing perpetuate their poverty.

What is called xenophobia actually consists of local attempts to solve social and economic problems, albeit in a questionable manner. The problems that need to be solved in local communities are nested in broader systems of power and privilege within South Africa. The nature of these problems will be highlighted in the following section, which describes collaborative conflict resolution as a means for addressing violence against foreigners in South Africa.

#### **7.2.4 The contribution of an identity perspective towards addressing violence against foreigners in South Africa**

To the extent that one moves away from an understanding of prejudice as existing in the psyche of individuals towards one that explains prejudice as the product of group relations in a context of intergroup social and economic struggle, the power relations and inequality within South African society are exposed as drivers of prejudice.

Attempts have been made to shape public discourse on foreign migrants through the creation of a superordinate group identity of 'African'. The phrase, "We are all Africans" has been deployed by various groups in anti-xenophobia discourse (Mail & Guardian 2015; Plaatjie 2015; Sithole 2015), but unless the political and economic drivers of violent protest in general and violence against foreigners in particular are addressed, it is possible that this will only shift the deployment of the term 'foreigner' to people of European descent and raise the question of what makes someone an African. The inescapable antagonism in hegemonic freedom Discourse demands such an 'Other'.

Within the broader scope of addressing issues of social power and economic inequality in South Africa, local problems need to be solved. To the extent that contact between foreigners and those who consider themselves to be indigenous consists of collaborative processes to identify local problems and generate solutions to them, such contact may diminish hostility and build trust. This will be developed further through the application of organisational conflict management to the problem of violence against foreigners in the section that follows.

### **7.3 Resolving Conflict**

The perspective of organisational conflict management contributes further to the proposals that emerge from the perspectives on prejudice from Social Psychology. A collaborative approach to conflict facilitates contact that meets the criteria for the reduction of prejudice, addresses problems within a local context, and can create a superordinate group identity that is the basis for the mobilisation of collective efforts to bring about positive social change.

#### **7.3.1 Self-interest in zero-sum conflicts**

What is called xenophobia can be seen as a local strategy for dealing with certain conflicts of interest in communities. The narratives of co-researchers show that conflict between South Africans and foreigners is being viewed as a zero-sum conflict over jobs, economic opportunities, houses, and other issues. Similarly, the zero-sum perceptions of the broader conflict over economic resources in South Africa is seen in popular discourse about economic reform – that there is a given quantity of economic wealth that simply needs to be

shared more fairly. Economic reform is conceived in distributive terms rather than integrative terms.

Game theory, a formal study of conflict, cooperation, and decision making in strategic situations (Myerson 1991; Fudenberg & Tirole 1991), provides insights into the strategies that are deployed in competitive approaches to conflict. Nash (1950) demonstrated that in non-cooperative conflicts, an equilibrium point is reached at which all parties choose what they think is best for them, given their perceptions of what the other party will do.

This is illustrated in a scenario known as the “Prisoner’s Dilemma” (Smale 1980; Peterson 2015). The traditional version of the game has the police arresting two suspects and interrogating them in separate rooms. Each can either defect and betray the other, or they can cooperate by both remaining silent. No matter what the other suspect does, each suspect can improve his own position by defecting and implicating the other. If one of them confesses and implicates the other, he will get a lesser sentence as a state witness. This makes defection/confession the dominant strategy for both prisoners, even though when both confess, the outcome is worse for both than when both cooperate and keep silent. Both prisoners inevitably betray the other, because this is guaranteed to improve their situation. The Nash Equilibrium predicts the choice of betrayal in this scenario.

Where either party can choose to collaborate or compete, parties inevitably choose a competitive approach because of the possibility that the other party will do so; the adoption of a collaborative approach would be disadvantageous if the other party does not reciprocate. In zero-sum conflicts, where one party’s gain is perceived to be the other party’s loss, there is a tendency for parties to pursue their narrow interests in a manner that leads to sub-optimal outcomes.

In what is perceived to be a zero-sum conflict between poor South Africans and foreign migrants, the possibility of loss leads to the adoption of a competitive approach to the conflict by South Africans, in which foreigners are attacked and attempts are made to expel them. In terms of the Nash Equilibrium, this seems like the only rational approach to the conflict. However, it does not produce optimal outcomes. Rather than working with other parties to find creative ways to solve problems that affect all involved, one party attempts to defeat the other to satisfy their interests. The other party is regarded as an obstacle to the fulfilment of the other’s needs, thus constituting the other party as the problem.

### 7.3.2 Collaborative conflict

Collaborative or integrative approaches to conflict have been described by Fisher and Ury (1981), Rubin (1991), Isenhardt and Spangle (2000), Levine (2009) and many others. Integrative approaches to conflict approach conflict resolution as a joint venture (Rubin 1991). This requires parties to develop an “enlightened self-interest” (Rubin 1991:4) where both parties recognise that it is in their interests to help the other achieve their goals.

Collaborative approaches to conflict move through phases that embody certain principles:

#### *7.3.2.1 Separate the people from the problem*

This de-linking of the problem from the parties involved is similar to the Narrative approach’s externalisation of problems. The creation of distance between the problem and the parties allows the problem to be explored without accusations and blame. To the extent that either party is regarded as the problem it is impossible to find collaborative solutions.

The problem is therefore not foreigners, the problem is not xenophobic South Africans, the problem is the problem. It could be defined in various ways with reference to issues such as improving living conditions in communities, sharing skills and knowledge to create employment, building inclusive communities, and others. To the extent that the formulation of these statements is positive and invitational they facilitate participation and creativity rather than defensiveness.

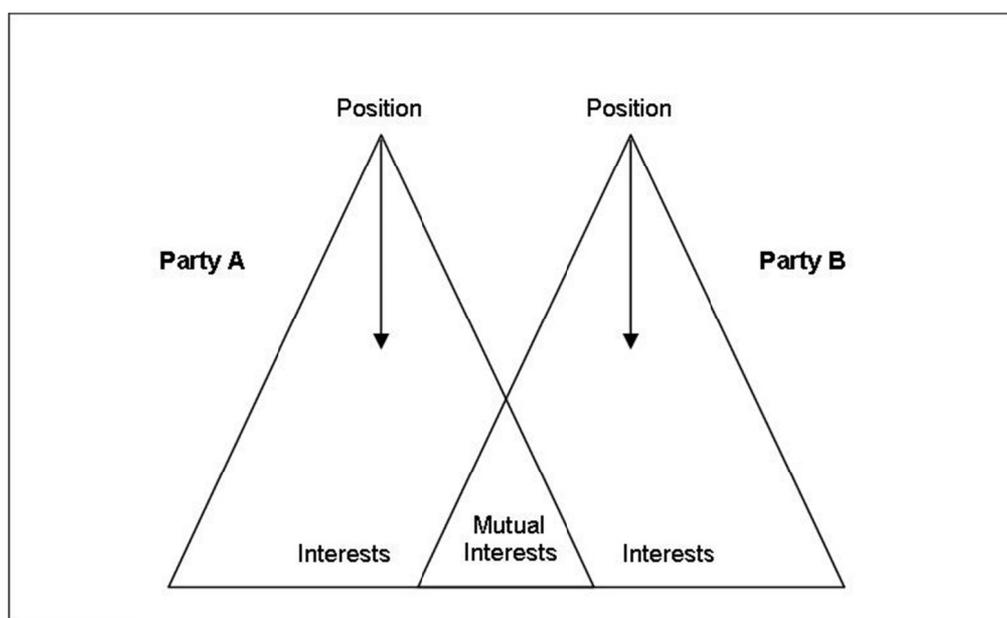
#### *7.3.2.2 Focus on interests, not positions*

Parties educate each other by describing their perceptions of the problem, identify and discuss the issues, and explain their concerns and list their assumptions. Collaborative approaches to conflict seek to create dialogue that explores the needs and interests of all parties, rather than defending positions. Arguing over positions is inefficient, endangers the relationship, and produces unwise agreements (Fisher & Ury 1981:4-6). The move from defending positions and discussing rights to discussing interests makes it possible for solutions to emerge that may not be reflected in the claims and positions of either party. Competitive approaches to conflict offer options of defeat, accommodate, or compromise. All of these represent a loss of value for at least one party and in the case of compromise an erosion of value for both.

In order to move from positions to interests the reasons why a particular position is taken are investigated. Why is a particular position appealing? Why is a particular demand made? This investigation helps make explicit the various needs of the parties. A “pool of shared meaning” (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler 2002) that includes the interests, needs and concerns of all parties is created through dialogue. This process is valuable for a number of reasons. The sharing of information enhances trust. It also facilitates a thicker description of the problem that includes its impact on all parties.

Concerns reveal the reasons why parties adopt particular positions or make particular demands. Positions represent only one of many possible solutions to a problem. There are always underlying needs that lead to the adoption of certain positions. The exploration of interests and needs improves opportunities for collaboration.

*Figure 7.1 Moving from positions to interests (adapted from Grzybowski & Morris 1998)*



It is particularly important to recognise shared needs and concerns, as these can provide a sense of partnership from which to consider areas of difference.

The positions taken by many South Africans with regard to foreigners find a focal point in demands that they must leave because of the various negative impacts they are perceived to have on local communities. Such a position is one possible solution to a number of needs and interests. These include: jobs, freedom from crime, safety and security, better living conditions, dignity, and others. Foreign migrants have very similar needs and interests. A collaborative approach would argue that on the basis of these shared interests

it makes more sense to work in partnership to advance shared interests than it does to compete.

### *7.3.2.3 Invent options for mutual gain*

The exploration of the needs and concerns of all parties, in relation to the problem, creates a shift from adversarial conflict to conflict where the parties develop a partnership to solve the problem. The combined knowledge and experience of all parties is harnessed in this partnership, in order to produce as many options for solving the problem as possible. The goal at this stage is to produce the broadest possible selection of alternatives rather than to evaluate them. Evaluation will take place in the following phase.

This process may adopt various problem-solving strategies, including research, problem definition and root cause analysis, breaking complex problems into smaller problems, considering the place of the problem within systems, and understanding the various constraints that may be applicable. Once the problem is understood the goal becomes a generation of multiple options for solving the problem. Moore (2003) lists strategies for this, such as resource expansion, trades, alternation, and the designing of new and integrative interest based solutions.

The invention of options is a process aimed at creating value rather than claiming value (Lax & Sebenius 1986:37). Claiming value involves demands, exaggeration, and minimising the claims of others. Creating value involves sharing information in order to develop trust, and have as much information as possible available to all parties; looking for trades and solutions that benefit all parties.

### *7.3.2.4 Use objective criteria to choose the best options*

Once multiple options have been identified, the parties assess how well their interests will be satisfied by each of the options that have been generated collaboratively. The use of objective criteria facilitates the process of deciding which options will be most suitable to all groups. It also ensures that there are fair and independent standards for decision making. Objective criteria can include factors such as achievability, cost, time scale, advantages, and opportunities or risks.

The selection of options involves comparing the options with the parties' interests to determine whether they adequately address and meet these. It can also involve creating

combinations or ‘baskets’ of options that complement each other or that involve trades and concessions. The process allows stakeholders to craft their own solutions to local problems, and participation results in a high level of buy-in from the parties.

Once solutions have been identified, agreements need to be formalised. These might include action steps, responsibilities, time frames, and mechanisms for evaluation and review.

### **7.3.3 Advantages of a collaborative approach**

There are numerous advantages to a collaborative approach to conflict, particularly its application to conflicts between South Africans and those regarded as foreigners:

- It promotes joint decision making by aiming for voluntary agreement among those involved in a dispute;
- Existing conflict management mechanisms, including customary or traditional ways of managing conflicts can be used to resolve conflict, using a collaborative approach;
- It is a flexible process, low-cost process that is easy for people to access;
- It instils a sense of ownership in the process of implementing solutions;
- It builds capacity building within communities, enabling local people to manage conflicts that arise within their context; and
- It is a process that facilitates social learning, and that may be effective in reducing prejudice as people work together to solve problems and achieve collective goals.

It also provides opportunities for new meanings to emerge as a product of dialogue. In this sense conflict is “both an opportunity and a requirement for the actors to review their existing definitions, search for new insights and meanings, and question their assumptions while engaging each other in mindset-altering discussion and the construction and enactment of realities” (Aggestam & Keenan 2007:437). Collaborative conflict resolution can be described as a transversal process because it produces new meanings and new possibilities for action at the intersections of different narratives and claims. Transversality recognises the ubiquity of pluralism and accommodates it rather than trying to eliminate it (Osmer 2006).

A collaborative approach to conflict could be instrumental in building cohesion and reducing violence communities, especially where there are power imbalances. Hardy, Lawrence and Grant (2005) argue that collaboration is needed to deal with social problems. It allows parties to leverage their different resources in order to develop solutions to the problems. Problem-solving dialogue facilitates the development of collective identity as well as producing results.

### **7.3.4 The contribution of a conflict perspective towards addressing violence against foreigners in South Africa**

The underlying premise of collaborative approaches, that conflict indicates the existence of a problem(s) within a relationship, suggests that conflict is unavoidable in South Africa, given the harsh inequalities that exist within its society. However, research has demonstrated that conflict can be a positive force for building collaborative practices within groups (Achinstein 2002; Uline, Tschannen-Moran & Perez 2003).

Misago (2012) identified the absence of appropriate and effective local conflict resolution mechanisms as a factor that contributes to violence against foreigners. Effective local conflict resolution structures are needed to address problems such as those brought to light by violence against foreigners in South Africa.

It is beyond the scope of this study to fully describe a collaborative process for resolving conflict between South Africans and foreign migrants. In this discussion I have argued for the value of collaborative conflict resolution processes for solving social problems. Such processes are both respectful and effective; the collaborative process strengthens relationships as well as solving problems.

In order to solve South Africa's complex social and economic problems, collaborative processes would need to include other parties, particularly white South Africans. While there might be a lack of geographical proximity between white South Africans and the communities where violence against foreigners occurs, the positions and interests of white South Africans are not neutral. To suggest that the conflict is only between poor South Africans and foreign nationals living in their communities is to ignore the role of others in perpetuating an economic system that has been built on exploitation and injustice. Accusations of xenophobia may be readily deployed by some in order to protect their own

interests and to avoid the scrutiny of their position within broad systems of privilege and inequality in South Africa.

## **7.4 Overcoming antagonism**

What is described as xenophobia reflects a collective political identity that is the product of shared concrete demands. Expectations of social change have not been met and promises of a better life remain unfulfilled. This gives rise to various political demands, including demand for houses, jobs, services, and a level of economic consumption that constitutes economic freedom. The presence of large numbers of foreigners is perceived to be a threat to these demands. Mouffe's proposals for agonism and radical democracy offer possibilities for the transformation of relations between South Africans and foreigners, especially in conjunction with the insights that emerge from the application of theories of organisational conflict management. The work of Laclau and Mouffe, and Laclau in particular, on the role of the empty signifier in hegemonic discourse offers possibilities for the creation of alternative hegemonic discourses that might disrupt and dislocate the current discourse on foreigners.

### **7.4.1 Agonistic democracy**

Mouffe regards the political as irreducibly pluralistic and antagonistic. The aim of democratic politics is the transformation of this antagonism into agonism. She explains:

...by 'the political' I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political (Mouffe 2005:9).

Antagonism is described by Mouffe as a friend/enemy distinction in which no common ground exists and the enemy is perceived as a threat. In contrast to this, agonism recognises the legitimacy of opposition, and transforms the other from an enemy that needs to be destroyed to an adversary whose existence is considered legitimate despite the conflict that exists with them (Mouffe 2005:20).

This leads to her argument that the task of politics is to imagine and create a public realm in which vigorous agonistic contestation occurs between different hegemonic

projects (Mouffe 2005:3). A weakness of Mouffe's proposals for agonistic democracy is that she offers little in the way of concrete application with regard to the specific institutions and practices that would enable agonistic relations.

#### 7.4.1.1 *Agonism and consensus*

Mouffe's attempt to make antagonism the basis of a normative meta-theory of the political rather than a descriptive theory (Townshend 2004; Erman 2009:1045) leads to an aversion to deliberation and consensus that has been the subject of criticism from Knops (2007) and Erman (2009).

Erman argues that antagonism is impossible without deliberation because any comparison must proceed from common presumptions. In order for there to be an "against" there must be some kind of consensus. There can be no conflict without some form of deliberation in the form of speech-acts that perform as validity claims. These must take place within some kind of shared symbolic space (Erman 2009:1046-1047).

Knops (2007) argues that consensus which is based on argumentation is intrinsic to Mouffe's model. He points out that Mouffe's opposition to the oppressive use of political power depends on some kind of consensus that must arise from equality and reciprocity in the exchange of reasons during argumentation. She does the same when she argues that the purpose of politics is the eradication of oppression through collective action.

Knops (2007:123-124) points out that Mouffe's opposition to consensus is based on flawed conclusions that arise from her theory's reliance on the thought of Wittgenstein and Derrida. With regard to Wittgenstein, Mouffe assumes that because language is grounded in practice rather than reason, it cannot be used to reach rational consensus. Furthermore, following Wittgenstein, she regards the diverse uses of language, within different games, as excluding the possibility of reasoned communication because of their variety and the absence of any rules governing their usage. Knops argues that because deliberative theories mobilise a form of rationality that aims at intersubjective explanation and mutual understanding, they are compatible with a Wittgensteinian view on language as grounded in forms of life.

With regard to Derrida, Mouffe's argues from Derrida's (1973) notions of *difference* and the "constitutive other" that any form of consensus will always be unstable, partial, and biased against a group that it excludes. Knops responds by pointing out that the equally

partial and imperfect nature of deliberation renders it consistent with Mouffe's use of Derrida's concept of undecidability. While all decisions may contain elements of undecidability this does not eliminate the possibility of some kind of consensus being reached, albeit an imperfect consensus. Some form of consensus cannot be guaranteed, but neither can the possibility of it be eliminated. The only way to find out whether it is possible is through the reasoning and explanation of argument (Knops 2007:124).

Mouffe proposes a constructive agonism within politics without clarifying how this is to be attained and how destructive antagonism is to be avoided. Knops' proposal (2007:125), that deliberative and agonistic democracy are mutually dependent and complementary solutions, addresses this weakness in Mouffe. He summarises his argument that Mouffe's agonistic theory of democracy can be regarded as deliberative, and that deliberation and rational consensus can be seen as agonistic:

Deliberation is equivalent to the Wittgensteinian process of explanation and language learning. The understandings reached through either process are partial and defeasible, formed from an encounter with difference. In this sense, there is always the risk of an agreement or consensus resulting in the erroneous projection of one party's understandings onto another, constraining their meanings – it is fraught with the possibility of hegemony. We must guard against such hegemonic tendencies by remaining open to every possibility of their exercise, holding discourses up to careful scrutiny of the language and assumptions that might underlie them. Not only will this help resist power, it will also assist in building deeper and better understanding, or more rational consensus (Knops 2007:125).

The importance of Knops' critique for this study is that it demonstrates that a deliberative attempt to reach some kind of consensus is congruent with Mouffe's agonistic theory of democracy. The same would therefore apply to collaborative processes for resolving conflict. Such processes would not only open up possibilities for some kind of consensus, they would create awareness of difference and expose power relations to scrutiny, simultaneously making change possible and challenging oppressive practices. In this way collaborate conflict resolution processes could be a means to achieve the agonistic relations Mouffe proposes within radical democracy.

#### *7.4.1.2 The rationale for agonism rather than antagonism*

A further critique of Mouffe is that she does not adequately explain how antagonism is transformed into agonism (Erman 2009). Mouffe seems to suggest that the transformation from antagonism to agonism is a moral choice, but she does not explain

this choice or ground it in any way. Erman is critical of this because it assumes that certain ethico-political principles simply exist and can be accessed through introspection. It assumes some kind of intrapersonal structure exists that precedes the interpersonal, and that this can be used to make moral choices in the interpersonal arena (Erman 2009:1050).

Erman argues that conflict presupposes a common understanding as well as difference, and that a deliberative framework enables the agonistic relationship that Mouffe desires, but that lacks practical exposition in her theory. Erman writes,

When deliberation is at work, through an interplay between an interpersonal and intrapersonal dimension, conflicts (*within* and *between* people) both emerge and transform. The meeting with the other affects the search for coherence among my own conflicting values (intrapersonal dimension) at the same time as the (potentially contested) relationship between me and the other (interpersonal dimension) is shaped by this 'inner' undertaking (Erman 2009:1051).

In view of Erman's critique of Mouffe, it would be more helpful to ground the choice to transform antagonism into agonism in human rationality, as described by Van Huyssteen (1998, 1999).

#### *7.4.1.3 Agonism and rationality*

There is an interesting overlap between Van Huyssteen and Mouffe because of the manner in which transversal rationality and agonism reflect the same desire for meaningful dialogue in a context of pluralism. When one applies Van Huyssteen's notion of rationality to agonism, it is not a moral choice at all; it is a choice to pursue intelligibility, optimal understanding, and better solutions to problems.

Furthermore, transversal rationality provides a framework for what Mouffe wishes to achieve in agonistic relations. Contentious situations involve the construction and organisation of realities through communication (Aggestam & Keenan 2007). An agonistic engagement of adversaries, where difference does not necessitate antagonism, looks remarkably similar to transversal rationality. The human ability to make responsible judgments about reality, argue persuasively for these in order to solve problems, and apply the same resources of rationality across disciplines, practices, and cultures could underpin the transformation of antagonism into agonism in a manner that renders Mouffe's radical democracy practicable as a form of transversal rationality.

## 7.4.2 Radical democracy

Mouffe clarifies that the misconception that agonistic democracy and radical democracy are the same thing, “They are completely different and located at different levels. Radical democracy is a political project. Agonistic democracy is an analytical theory. It does not have any political content” (Mouffe, in Hansen & Sonnichsen 2014:266).

Townshend (2004) draws attention to Mouffe’s concession that liberal democracy needs to be justified by something more than its procedures, for it to be based on some form of “substance” that encourages the proclivity to discuss differences with an opponent rather than use force (Mouffe 1993: 129). For Mouffe, this desire arises from a mutual loyalty to contingently created liberal-democratic principles.

### 7.4.2.1 Radical democracy and *Societas*

Mouffe is wary of the liberal view, derived from Rawls (1971), that “citizenship is the capacity for each person to form, revise, and rationally pursue his/her definition of the good”. She notes the communitarian critique of this as an impoverished notion that excludes the idea of citizenship as collective action in pursuit of the common good (1993). She refers to Sandel’s (1982) criticism of the liberal view of citizenship, that it precludes the possibility of a community that constitutes the identity of individuals and limits community to something that is purely instrumental, something that unites individuals with existing needs and identities to further the pursuit of these.

However, Mouffe argues that a modern democratic political community cannot be organised around a single substantive idea of the common good. Individual liberty cannot be sacrificed for the sake of collective interests. She writes,

... we need to conceive of a mode of political association that, although it does not postulate the existence of a substantive common good, nevertheless implies the idea of commonality, of an ethico-political bond that creates a linkage among the participants in the association, allowing us to speak of a political ‘community’ even if it is not in the strong sense (Mouffe 1992:75-76).

She attempts to draw on both the liberal and the communitarian traditions to develop a conception of citizenship that is suitable for radical democracy, and in order to do this she refers to Oakeshott’s notion of *societas* (Mouffe 1993: 66–7).

Oakeshott (1975) uses the terms *societas* and *universitas* to describe alternative possibilities for the modern state. *Universitas* refers to an association in which people unite, to pursue a common substantive purpose or promote a common interest, in such a manner that they constitute a cohesive entity, "...a partnership of persons which is itself a Person..." (Oakeshott 1975:203). In contrast to *universitas*, *societas* is a form of association in which the relationship is defined by rules and a "practice of civility" rather than common purpose. He explains,

The idea *societas* is that of agents who, by choice or circumstance, are related to one another so as to compose an identifiable association of a certain sort. The tie which joins them, and in respect of which each recognizes himself to be *socius*, is not that of an engagement in an enterprise to pursue a common substantive purpose or to promote a common interest, but that of loyalty to one another (Oakeshott 1975:201).

Mouffe finds Oakeshott's notion of *societas* attractive for her model of radical democracy. She does criticise what she argues is Oakeshott's flawed understanding of politics, which ignores division and antagonism, and argues that the consensus needed to establish the rules of *societas* once again erases division.

#### 7.4.2.2 *Societas and ubuntu*

A political community, based on the notion of *societas*, where there is no single common good that determines its agenda, could be described as a community of *ubuntu*. Within the South African context, *ubuntu* is more plausible as the basis of the type of association imagined by Oakeshott than his proposal that this could be accomplished by rather vague notions of loyalty and civility.

*Ubuntu* does not prescribe a single agenda for the common good, but allows for a plurality of choices and actions as long as these fulfil its fairly broad ethical requirements. The good of all is achieved through the consideration of shared humanity as the ethical basis for individual actions rather than by the assimilation of people into a single fixed political agenda.

*Ubuntu* holds together the individual and the communal by recognising the value of the individual in terms of shared humanity and by shaping individual choices and conduct in terms of the good of that shared humanity. On that basis I would argue that *ubuntu* not only accommodates the pluralism that Mouffe wishes to recognise and wishes to protect in

radical democracy, it also provides a basis for transforming the antagonism inherent in pluralism into agonism.

### 7.4.3 *Ubuntu* as an empty universal

I have noted the possibilities that *ubuntu* holds as a basis for a *societas* that could make Mouffe's agonism and radical democracy viable. *Ubuntu* also offers possibilities as an empty universal or empty signifier for an alternative hegemonic discourse to dislocate current hegemonic discourses around foreigners and form agonistic relations.

An empty signifier needs to be a powerful social ideal that is also vague and semantically flexible (Renner 2014). A recently published study on the current state of *ubuntu* discourse suggests that it meets these criteria and that while core elements of meaning remain, the meaning of *ubuntu* has been eroded (Eliastam 2015). In its current state *ubuntu* discourse presents possibilities as a symbolic representation of the political demands of a group whose identity is constituted by antagonism towards *un-ubuntu*.

Renner's study of reconciliation as an empty signifier shows how such signifiers can be "reinterpreted and bestowed with new normative authority and new meaning in the context of political struggles and severe social crisis" (Renner 2014:265). The adoption of a hegemonic reconciliation discourse brought with it the exclusion of punishment and certain notions of justice. In the same way a hegemonic discourse that emerges from *ubuntu* would exclude subjecting any human being to treatment or conditions that were inhuman, or that violated an ethic based on shared humanity. Instead of antagonism being directed at a group of people, it could be directed at inequality, greed and corruption, selfishness, and the lack of empathy that creates walls of indifference between affluent South Africans and the poor that surround them.

In suggesting this, I recognise the dangers of a vague notion of *ubuntu* being deployed as a panacea for complex social ills. The effectiveness of *ubuntu* to function as an empty universal would depend on the creation of chains of equivalence that connect it to the needs of all South Africans. These needs would include 'hard' issues such as safety, security, economic growth, and the reduction of the inequality that is the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. They would also include 'soft' needs for relational healing and reconciliation, trust, mutual respect, and collaborative relationships. Many of these could be addressed as issues of social justice, but moral imperatives lack the human element of

*ubuntu* and risk imposing a homogenising consensus on a plurality of people and circumstances. With *ubuntu*, transformed social relationships occur because when one sees people as human beings, human beings as shared humanity, and shared humanity as the reality that our lives are linked. This invites a generosity that is qualitatively different to the external imposition of moral imperatives. It is also a generosity that invites reciprocity.

As an empty universal, *ubuntu* could represent our shared humanity, and become a symbol for the multiple human needs and demands for a just society, as well as a catalyst to mobilise people towards collective action to end oppressive practices.

*Ubuntu* is not unique to South Africa, and has parallels in other African philosophical systems (Murithi 2006; Gathogo 2008), as well as in Western thought. Prinsloo (1998:48) points out that “the vocabulary of *ubuntu* is clearly not unfamiliar to Western thinking”. Concepts such as brotherhood, sharing, dignity and trust are present in many Western contexts and much of Western thought. Gathogo (2008:46) discerns parallels between *ubuntu* and the notion of Being (*Sein*) as “Being-with” in Martin Heidegger’s philosophy. Letseka (2012:55) describes the similarities between *ubuntu* and von Humboldt’s notion of *bildung*. The fact that *ubuntu* values are intrinsic to African culture, but are also expressed in Western cultures, offers hope for crafting a society based on *ubuntu*.

#### **7.4.4 The contribution of Laclau and Mouffe’s political theory towards addressing violence against foreigners in South Africa**

Jones (2014) describes the significant contribution that Mouffe’s thought makes to the conceptualising of the political in post-conflict societies such as South Africa. Jones notes that reconstruction and development practice is typically based on the hypothesis that violence occurs due to the absence of democracy and development, and this results in a bias towards assimilation as a solution to violence. The result is a focus on development, and the social change and security it seems to promise. Duffield (2002:1049) argues that in such contexts, development is reinvented and deployed as a strategic tool to resolve conflicts and reconstruct society. The desire to create a particular kind of state and society, “a liberal democracy complete with elections, rule of law, market economics and a population which performs civic and consumerist duties”, arises from the assumption that conflict and violence result from the absence of modernity (Jones 2014:252). Pugh (2009:85) describes these endeavours as attempts to “democratize the unruly”.

Jones argues that the imperatives of development give rise to a focus on maintaining order through policing rather than consideration of the plurality of political formations and the needs that these represent. She argues that this neglects the actual social contract that is needed within and alongside the broader institutions of the state, as well as the needs and experiences of ordinary people and the political agency that arises from these. She writes,

The requirement of a consensus over the boundary and content of social and political communities casts that which falls outside the purview of modernity as illiberal, deviant, barbarous and irrational. However, the politics of the conflicts which may be part of post-war life (for example religious identities, resource distribution in a context of scarcity and the division of political power) may impact upon the ability of reconstruction and development interventions to achieve their goals. Moreover, these conflicts may raise questions about the nature of the goals themselves and illuminate contesting visions of co-existence (Jones 2014:252).

Jones argues that Mouffe's political theory offers an alternative vision for post-conflict democratic life to the prevailing approach of democracy through development and assimilation. Mouffe (1995:100) raises the important question of: "how to make our belonging to different communities of values, language, culture, and others compatible with our common belonging to the political community".

Mouffe's conceptualisation of politics opposes apolitical interventionism, and recognises the importance of local political agency. It suggests that local negotiation and decision making should be favoured over interventions from external actors. It recognises that appropriate contestation over how certain values should be represented and realised is preferable to the imposition of consensus (Jones 2014:253). Rather than focusing on the structures and institutions that are typical of democracy (what Jones terms "hardware"), such an approach develops capacity within local people to resolve conflicts and deal with problems ("software"). In this way a teleological approach that aims to 'arrive' by design at the necessary and sufficient conditions for democracy is abandoned in favour of an understanding of democracy formation as an ongoing process of contestation (Mouffe 1992:238).

In a similar vein to Mouffe, Schaap argues that social conflict cannot be eliminated. This creates the need for:

...a space for politics within which citizens divided by the moments of past

wrongs debate and contest the terms of their political association. Instead of looking to politics to secure a common identity, reconciliation would depend on founding and sustaining a space for politics within which the emergence of a common identity is an ever present possibility (Schaap 2004:538).

Mouffe argues that where social relations are unstable, systems that aim to manage and contain differences will be ineffective and antagonisms will multiply, making their transformation to agonism difficult (Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

Laclau and Mouffe provide a descriptive framework that makes sense of the emergence of violence against foreigners in South Africa as the product of discourse. In demonstrating how the empty signifier can become a metaphor that represents the needs and political demands of the collective it produces, they also point to possibilities for shaping popular discourse regarding foreigners in South Africa. Different metaphors could be the starting point for alternative hegemonic discourses that disrupt meanings created by the current discourses.

Finally, Mouffe's proposals for agonistic democracy point to a need for local spaces where agonistic contestation between adversaries can take place. While her own work is thin in terms of how this could be achieved, the arguments of Knops for the integration of the deliberative and agonistic models suggests that the development of local capacity for collaborative conflict resolution has the potential to contribute to the transformation of antagonism into agonistic relations.

## **7.5 Rationality and the violence against foreigners in South Africa**

Van Huyssteen (1999) argues that rationality consists of the human capacity to construct beliefs about reality. This is something that all humans do. The epistemic goals of rationality are intelligibility and optimum understanding, in order to propose suitable solutions to problems within a specific context.

The violence against foreigners in South Africa is not so much prejudice as it is irrationality; it is perpetuated by rational agents and is an attempt to solve a problem that is shaped by a particular understanding of the problem. It is a problem-solving activity that arises from sense-making activity. In that sense it reflects the characteristics of rationality. Rational agents evaluate their situation, assess evidence, and then make decisions based on this

(Van Huyssteen 1999:143). This process has given rise to a rationality that is the product of discourse in certain South African contexts.

### **7.5.1 Sense-making and problem-solving in a local context**

For Van Huyssteen (2006:11), rationality is always contextual because it only exists as people live with other people in concrete contexts, situations and traditions. I have argued that within the South African context, violence has long been regarded as a tool for solving problems. There are strong traditions of exclusion and exceptionalism in South Africa. The rationality of *amakwerekwere* that emerges as a product of discourse represents the best possible understanding that people have of their circumstances.

The epistemic goals of this particular rationality involve making sense of a life in which the chances of transcending grinding poverty are slim. They involve making sense of broken political promises and a growing gulf between the haves and the have-nots. They involve attempting to understand what role the presence of outsiders plays in these circumstances. These are profoundly existential epistemic goals, and the fact that they are not pursued within the structured confines and methods of academic disciplines should not lead to them being relegated to an inferior status

As much as the violence against foreigners is the product of a certain rationality, it could be argued that it is not based on optimum understanding and is not the best solution to the problem. The intersections of the various Discourses described in chapter 5 create understandings that are far from optimum, leading to irrational problem solving strategies. However, given the enabling and restraining constraints that exist, their actions represent what they understand to be the best, or perhaps only, option available for them to deal with certain problems in their context.

### **7.5.2 Better understanding and better solutions**

To argue that what is called xenophobia is a form of rationality is not to suggest that it should be condoned or accepted. Rather, understanding the construction of meaning that leads to violence against foreigners in this way points to possibilities for change. Change can result from the construction of new meanings and better understandings. Change can also result from discovering better solutions to problems.

Van Huyssteen argues that intelligibility and optimal understanding are the litmus test of rationality as well as its goals. Where what Matsinhe (2011) calls “the ideology of

*makwerekwere*” does not offer convincing reasons for the understandings of the world it represents; alternative understandings supported by better reasons need to be explored. These cannot be imposed, but should rather emerge from processes of social interaction. Within a Narrative approach alternative understandings could emerge from curiosity and questions, based on a not-knowing position.

Reflecting on this study provided co-researchers with an opportunity to construct new meanings with regard to the presence of foreigners in their communities. This new understanding made it possible for them to imagine alternative solutions to the one of expelling foreigners. Suggestions included: creating a list of specific problems in communities that affected all of the parties; sitting down together with foreigners to try to solve these problems; sharing knowledge and expertise; implementing projects to transform communities in partnership with foreign migrants; educating people so that they are not threatened by difference; and, returning to traditional cultures and values such as *ubuntu*.

This suggests at least a number of options to address the problem of violence against foreigners:

- The identification of the specific problems in local contexts that give rise to the concrete political demands expressed in hegemonic discourses. Unless these demands are met, or the circumstances that give rise to them changed, it is unlikely that violence against foreigners will decrease. It is more likely that it will increase and spread to target a broader designation of ‘foreigner’.
- The creation of spaces for transversal dialogue in local contexts, through which the problems and their relationships to the various stakeholders can be better understood. To expect widespread consensus might be unrealistic, but consensus may be a product of new meanings that emerge in such conversations.
- The facilitation of collaborative problem-solving processes that attempt to reach whatever level of consensus is possible on the solutions to these problems.
- Implementation of these solutions by partnerships. If some form of intergroup contact is to break down social divisions in South Africa, and challenge prejudice, contact that occurs within civic partnerships aimed at solving local problems is more likely to achieve this than contact at workshops or cultural events because it meets the criteria for effective contact described by Allport

and others.

- The use of ritual to mark transitions to new ways of relating. It is not possible to be prescriptive here, or to attempt to cover the range of rituals that might be possible or appropriate for this. Rituals might be drawn from cultural or religious practices, particularly those that involve cleansing or new beginnings. Within a Narrative approach, definitional ceremonies (Myerhoff 1982) and reflecting teams (Anderson 1987) might offer possibilities.

The insights documented in this study, from Social Psychology on prejudice, from Organisational Psychology on conflict resolution, and from Political Science on antagonism, all point to the importance of leadership. Meaning is shaped by leadership discourses. Leaders are involved in mobilisation against foreigners. Conflict resolution requires leadership, and the absence of effective structure for resolving conflicts reflects a lack of leadership.

The role of leadership in the production of violence against foreigners in South Africa has been documented by several researchers (Misago et al 2009; Mosselson 2010; Misago 2012; Nieftagodien 2012; Hayem 2013; Kerr & Durrheim 2013). Studies point to the key role of leaders in promoting violence against foreigners, both at an elite and local level. This study will conclude with a discussion of leadership, and particularly leadership as a discursive performance in the construction of meaning with regard to foreigners.

## **7.6 Discursive leadership and the ‘Other’**

Leadership studies have typically focused on the individual and psychological characteristics of leadership rather than investigating it through a social and cultural lens. The term ‘Discursive Leadership’ is used for a body of work on the social, linguistic, and cultural aspects of leadership. Rather than attempting to explore the attitudes, thoughts and other characteristics of leaders, discursive leadership explores the actual interactional processes and linguistic patterns that constitute leadership.

The lens of Discursive Leadership is particularly helpful for understanding the role of leadership in the social construction of meaning, which is the focus of this study.

### 7.6.1 The social construction of leadership

From a social constructionist perspective, leadership is a product of collective meaning making within a socio-historical context. Leadership is continuously negotiated and co-constructed through a complex interplay among various leadership actors, including designated leaders, emerging leaders, and their followers (Collinson 2006; Grint 2000; Meindl 1995).

Theories that essentialise leadership as something found in a leader's personal qualities, in situational factors, or as a combination of these, are resisted. Grint (2000) notes that in trait, situational, and contingency theories of leadership there is an "essence" to either the leader, the context, or a combination of the two and this "essence" points to a single best way to lead. Grint (2000:3) rejects the notion of essence in favour of a socially constructed view of leadership because both situations and the best way of leading in one are open to interpretation. Social constructionists tend to favour an attributional view of leadership in which the nature of leadership is contested and in terms of which leadership depends on followers regarding someone as a leader (Barker 2002; Meindl 1995; Fairhurst & Grant 2010).

Fairhurst and Grant (2010) point out that social constructionist approaches to leadership usually avoid a leader-centric approach that regards the leader's personality, style, and/or actions as the dominant influences that determine the thoughts and actions of followers. Most constructionist approaches recognise the ability of followers to also make sense of and evaluate their experiences as being equally important (Meindl 1995:332). The nature of leadership as a reality that is co-constructed in interactions between social actors is emphasised. This leads constructionist approaches to leadership to emphasise the social or relational rather than the individual (Holman & Thorpe 2003).

Leadership is socially constructed by the leaders and their followers, influenced by intermediaries such as the media (Liu 2010). It is not necessarily the domain of the individual, but can be distributed quite widely among members of an organisation or community (Fairhurst 2007:6).

Kelly summarises the impact that approaches such as social constructionism and poststructuralism have had on the study of leadership:

Leadership is no longer reducible to a tangible act of influence between stable categories of ‘leader’ and ‘follower’ with ‘leadership’ standing for a kind of dialectic that emerges from the joining of the two (Collinson 2006). Instead, leadership might involve an array of heterogeneous factors, elements, networks, discourses, subjects and objects. For example, leadership might exist in discursive regimes, metaphor, ordinary language, attributions, unconscious symbolic projections, or even in non-human ‘actants’ that provide the conditions for a complex leaderful relationship or dynamic to emerge ... What each of these critical approaches has in common is the notion that leadership does not exist within a person, or even within a relationship between bounded figures called leaders and followers. Instead, leadership represents a kind of epiphenomenon that organizes and determines our experience of social reality and our experience of ourselves (Kelly 2014:907-908).

Within constructionist approaches to leadership there is an increasingly praxis-oriented turn towards discourse (Alvesson & Kärreman 2000a; Grant et al 2004).

### **7.6.2 Discursive leadership**

A constructionist approach to leadership brings communicative practices such as conversations, discourse, and other symbolic media to the forefront of leadership studies. Communication gives rise to leadership; it is not merely an input or an output in leadership processes. The implications of constructionist views of leadership are that leaders must constantly enact their relationship to their followers and “perform leadership in communication and through discourse” (Fairhurst 2007:5).

Marshak and Grant (2008) review the implications of this for studies of leadership:

- There is cognisance of how conversation, text, and narrative shape processes and change;
- There is awareness of how discourse creates and reinforces both the attitudes that shape behaviour, as well as the behaviour that shapes attitudes;
- There is a recognition that many socially constructed realities coexist within a context; and
- There is an acknowledgement of the need for certain power structures to be changed by changing the narratives that gave rise to them.

Discursive approaches to leadership take an ontological view of leaders as decentred subjects / thin actors rather than having some kind of “essence” that makes them a leader (Fairhurst 2007; Grint 2000). They also take the socio-historical and local situatedness of leadership seriously by attempting to understand the ways in which communication and

language are used in the series of “doings” that construct leadership in a specific context (Kelly 2008).

Discursive leadership explores the social, linguistic, and cultural aspects of leadership. It focuses on leadership discourse rather than the inner psychological world of the leader, both discourse as language used in ordinary social interaction and Discourse as systems of thought that provide the linguistic resources for communication (Fairhurst 2007).

Barker (2001, 2002) argues that the sphere with which leadership is concerned is the system of the community and its politics. Within this dynamic and often chaotic system, leadership involves the perception or attribution of emerging structure.

Hosking focuses on leadership processes and argues that these involves influential acts of organising, which,

...contribute to the structuring of interactions and relationships, activities and sentiments; processes in which definitions of social orders are negotiated, found acceptable, implemented and renegotiated; processes in which interdependencies are organized in ways which, to or greater or lesser degree, promote the values and interests of the social order. In sum, leadership can be seen as a certain kind of organizing activity (Hosking 1988:147).

There is an increased depiction of leaders as “managers of meaning” (Smircich & Morgan 1982; Shotter & Cunliffe 2003). An example of this is Shotter’s (1993) description of leadership as “practical authoring”. For Shotter this means that leaders have “*formative* power: the ability of people in otherwise vague, or only partially specified, incomplete situations . . . to ‘give’ or to ‘lend’ to such situations a more determinate linguistic formulation” (Shotter 1993:149-150, italics in original). Leaders shape history, because when they are confronted by conditions they have not chosen they can,

by producing an appropriate *formulation* of them, create (a) a landscape of enabling constraints (Giddens 1979) relevant for a range of next possible actions; (b) a network of ‘moral positions’ or ‘commitments’ (understood in terms of the rights and duties of the ‘players’ on that landscape); and (c) are able to argue persuasively and authoritatively for this ‘landscape’ amongst those who must work within it (Shotter 1993:149, italics in original).

The discursive lens on leadership provides descriptions of leadership that have certain emphases. Robinson (2001:93) argues that, “leadership is exercised when ideas expressed in talk or actions are recognised by others as capable of progressing tasks or problems which are important to them”. Fairhurst (2007:6) proposes that “leadership is

therefore a process of influence, through the management of meaning, that creates progress towards a goal. This may not be something done by just one person, and it can be distributed quite widely among members of an organisation or community”.

How leadership has been described tends to reflect context, “the politics of (leadership) truth vary by historical era” (Fairhurst 2011:498). Both leadership power in a particular context, as well as the understandings and solutions proposed in the act of leading, are shaped by Discourses. This echoes Foucault’s assertion that power is local, relational, and embedded in technologies that are governed by Discourses that have the power to discipline.

### **7.6.3 Leadership and rationality**

Bennis (2007) has proposed that leadership exists in the relationships between leaders, followers, and shared goals. Within a social constructionist perspective, leadership is a social activity that involves defining reality and making sense of it. It is an intentional facilitation of the social construction of reality. Leaders identify what is important and then find ways to communicate about the meaning of events and seek consensus (Pondy 1978; Smircich & Morgan 1982; Weick 1979).

The leadership described in this study involves both the construction of social reality and the social construction of reality (Pearce 1995). It shapes the nature of relationships between social actors, and the social interactions between them as shared goals are pursued. It also shapes the cognitive products of social interaction by creating categories, attributions and sense-making accounts. Each of these constructions impacts the other, which implies that to the extent that changes occur in the social construction of reality, and new sense-making accounts emerge, this will lead to new options for action and interaction.

When one conceptualises leadership as facilitating the constructing of social meaning in order to accomplish shared goals, it points to a close relationship between leadership and Van Huyssteen’s notion of rationality. Leadership, as the management of meaning, involves optimum understanding and solving problems. It extends beyond these to include attempts to mobilise collective action to solve the problems that have been identified – within the scope of whatever options or constraints are perceived to exist. The argument that leadership is a form of rationality should not be surprising because rationality is a

defining feature of humanity, it is rooted in the need to survive or adapt to the environment (Van Huyssteen 1998).

The human processes that Van Huyssteen describes as rationality are, in my understanding, identical in function to narrative. Narratives are attempts to make sense of the world and to understand problems. The stories that people tell represent their understanding of the world and their place in it. They shape people's futures by pointing to certain actions or solutions, based on conclusions drawn from the story.

The nature of leadership in South Africa is shaped by the specific problems faced in the country. More than that it is shaped by how those problems and their relationships to each other are understood, as well as by beliefs and expectations around what constitutes solutions to those problems. There are multiple interlinked problems in South Africa: inequality, landlessness, poverty, unemployment, crime, violence, prejudice, corruption, service delivery failure, the diminishing capacity of the state to provide education and basic health services, the presence of too many foreigners, and many others. These problems are reflected in the Discourses revealed by the stories of co-researchers in this study.

These Discourses are also present in the talk of leaders. The statements by elite leaders, referred to in chapter 5 join the dots between various problems and scapegoat foreigners to maintain political loyalty, account for a lack of social transformation, and ultimately avoid accountability. Elite leadership discourses contribute to an interpretive repertoire that is used by people to make sense of their lives and circumstances.

Dysfunctional local leadership structures are unable to solve problems and this leadership vacuum allows opportunistic parallel leadership structures to emerge and scapegoat foreigners to further their political and economic agendas.

In both of these instances leaders are able to offer sense-making accounts in which 'reality' and 'truth' are constructed through persuasive but unstable discourses. Grint (2003) highlights the role of persuasion in such processes. In both situations, the 'problem of foreigners' is constructed socially and the role of leaders is pivotal.

#### **7.6.4 Meaning and transversal narrativity**

At the end of chapter 5 I proposed the term transversal narrativity to describe the creation of new meanings at the intersection of various narratives that I observed in the stories of

co-researchers. The various narratives about foreigners that were revealed during interviews with co-researchers all intersect in various ways.

Narratives of poverty intersect with narratives of displacement and of damaged identity; these intersect with narratives of rights and entitlement. These intersect with autochthonous narratives of belonging and narratives of economic freedom. These intersections represent connections that are made in sense-making processes that result in certain meanings with regard to foreigners. These meanings give rise to certain 'solutions'. These meanings and solutions, while superficially similar to expressions of xenophobia in other parts of the world, are unique to the South African context.

The construction of new meaning at discursive intersections can be seen in the symbolic representation of the process of hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). The process begins with metonymy, and moves through metaphorical substitution to synecdoche. The meaning of the empty signifier changes during the movement from metonymy to synecdoche. Its connotations of something that is simultaneously vague and desirable give way to something more concrete; it comes to represent multiple demands that are connected by chains of equivalence. In synecdoche, the shift in meaning is complete and the signifier now represents a collective identity that has been united by its connection of various demands.

Brockelman explains the way that hegemony creates new meaning through the combination of different signifiers:

Articulation allows us to understand an identity as something other than a platonic essence. It is, rather, taken to be the result of the combination of two elements within a differential system of signifiers (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 105). This combination produces an explicitly *new meaning* – thus, its freedom from any fixed or 'natural' understanding of meaning. That is, because the modified terms (say, 'gay' and 'progressive'), while altered, retain something of their independence from each other (we can certainly still imagine non-progressive gays and vice versa), the identity is clearly *produced* rather than something pre-existent (Brockelman 2003:186, italics in original).

An individual's identity and their reality are produced by positions that they take in various discourses. This positioning means that "selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines" (Davies & Harré 1990:48). Multiple positions modify the content of both identity and reality. Social meanings emerge and are managed as different interpretations of events compete with each other in

social interaction (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). There are always a number of competing Discourses at play in any context. Fairhurst (2007:99) writes, “Because subjects attain their identities by being represented discursively, *identity* becomes a contingent identification with a subject position in a competitive discursive field”.

Weick (1979) has argued that meanings emerge in the interplay between narratives as cognitive patterns are imposed on a multitude of flexible and disordered phenomena through processes of organising. Greater competition within the discursive field creates the possibility that people can break free from the way a Discourse defines them. Fairhurst (2007:99) writes, “The presence of other meaning potentials, in effect, dislocates a subject’s identities, which opens a space for contingency and choice”.

These intersections between the stories of co-researchers are not simply a conflation of the various narratives, but rather the result of a transversal arrangement such as that described by Schrag (1992) and Van Huyssteen (1999). It is in the transversal intersections of stories that new meanings emerge, particularly at the multiple points where these narratives intersect.

The points at which narratives overlap and intersect are able to both modify the meanings of the intersecting narratives and create new meanings that arise from a combination or even a conflation of stories. The absence of certain narratives will shape meaning, as will the introduction of certain narratives. The different narratives reflect attempts to make sense of life and circumstances, and the convergence of multiple narratives produces new understandings that entrench previous understandings, modify them, or dislocate them.

New meanings and new possibilities for action are made possible by the introduction of new stories. It is however critical that some point(s) of natural intersection exists between narratives for new meaning to emerge. For example, *ubuntu* narratives will intersect with and shape narratives on land rights in South Africa, resulting in new meanings. Transversal intersections between these narratives and Christian narratives on social justice might produce even richer meaning. However, the introduction of narratives on parliamentary processes or challenges in healthcare are introduced in a transversal arrangement with these might produce no new meanings because there are no natural intersections between the stories. Not all narratives intersect. A complete absence of intersection will not result in any new meaning or any modification of meaning.

The intersections of the narratives revealed by the interviews with co-researchers suggested that needs and interests played a key role in individual's positioning themselves within various Discourses. The positions co-researchers took in discourses were all indicative of needs: needs for meaning and identity, needs for personal and social transformation, needs to escape poverty, needs to experience a sense of belonging, and others. The needs of co-researchers created an affinity for particular stories in a similar way to the process in which chains of equivalence bind concrete demands to the empty signifier for Laclau and Mouffe. This suggests that if leaders are to introduce new stories to people that are able to dislocate old stories and create new meaning, these stories will have to meet some perceived need that they have.

A multiplicity of connected narratives creates a need for new sense-making processes in order to assimilate the various stories. This need is rooted in the human need to survive or adapt to the environment that gives rise to rationality.

#### **7.6.5 Discursive leadership and transversal narrativity**

Schrag (2004:80) argues that “an unavoidable task of philosophy for the new millennium is that of installing the dynamics of transversal rationality and transversal communication across the landscape of difference within an increasingly global and pluralistic world order”. This need for transversality applies as much to social difference as it does to academic interdisciplinarity.

Leadership is concerned with the creation of new meanings and new possibilities for action. The task of leadership, conceived this way, is to facilitate the social processes of meaning making and problem-solving by telling new stories that intersect with existing dominant narratives, but simultaneously challenge or unsettle them. Discursive leadership is therefore a performance of transversal narrativity.

Transversal narrativity will not only introduce new stories that intersect transversally with dominant stories, it will intentionally facilitate the exploration of the intersections between the new stories and existing stories. It will shape meaning through the intentional introduction of new narratives, and the juxtaposition of these narratives with existing Discourses in a way that destabilises them or deconstructs them. It is inevitable that narratives will reflect both the positioning and the interests of leaders, but a multiplicity of narratives in transversal arrangement facilitates the participation of any number of parties.

New meanings will be shaped by the participation of multiple stories, not only the stories of a particular agent. Leadership as transversal narrativity is therefore invitational and well as provocative. It introduces new stories and asks for new stories.

The introduction of new stories through the creation of transversal narrativity is aimed at the deconstruction of dominant stories, especially dominant problem stories. Caputo (1997:110) writes that deconstruction prepares us for difference, or the entrance of the other. In this sense deconstruction is a way of welcoming the stranger; it is a form of hospitality. *Différance* challenges notions of identity because the meaning of something is what it is not. Identity is constituted by itself and by what is other to it (Derrida 1981; Taylor 1984:49). This makes deconstruction a creative, generative process that opens up spaces for new meanings and new practices. Deconstruction also creates a space for difference and for the other (Caputo 1997).

The Narrative approach has been influenced by poststructuralism's emphasis on language as an instrument of power with constitutive effects, and the deconstruction of dominant discourses which have a limiting influence in people's lives. However, a Narrative approach differs from poststructuralism because it regards people as the authors of the ways in which they understand their lives (Weedon 1987:30). It offers possibilities for the construction of new meanings and identity that transcend subjectivity as a fragile, contradictory site of struggle that is constantly being reconstituted in different discourses (Weedon 1987:33).

New stories do not only have the potential to create new identities, they are able to create new communities and new cultures. Our sense of we are can be unmade and then made. The stories that define who we are can be deconstructed and refabricated. We can develop alternative narratives of belonging (Bromley 2000) that move beyond what Shapiro calls,

Historical narratives that naturalize a particular, territorially oriented view of sovereignty, reinforce it with a political economy story that disparages pre-commercial systems of livelihood and exchange, and substitutes myths of evolutionary development for histories of violent confrontation and usurpation (Shapiro 1997:17).

Transversal narrativity facilitates intentional collaborative engagement with a world that is characterised by pluralism and the ubiquity of the other through the creation of new meanings and possibilities for action. It makes it possible for new meanings to emerge that offer new possibilities for optimum understanding and problem-solving. The dislocation and disruption of dominant stories through transversal narrativity will introduce new conditions

of liminality. Liminality represents a threshold for new possibilities to emerge, for different ways of knowing, different ways of being with those who are different, and different ways of solving problems in order to eliminate oppression and injustice.

## CHAPTER 8

### REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH

#### 8.1 Personal reflections

##### 8.1.1 The challenge of being a white researcher in post-apartheid South Africa

As I listened to the stories of co-researchers I was aware that, for some of them, I was a foreigner and an intruder in this country. For all of them, I experienced a kind of freedom that was far removed from their own experiences. Throughout the research journey I was acutely conscious of my whiteness and my privilege. I am sometimes tempted to consider myself as a 'good' white South African when I reflect on my personal involvement in resisting apartheid and discrimination. However, I am more conscious of my privilege as a white, male South African and what this represents.

During conversations with co-researchers I was acutely aware that, as a white man, I represented oppression and exploitation. My skin colour and the benefits it has brought me place me in what seemed to be regarded as a homogenous sea of white advantage and racism. I also represented an ideology of 'whiteness' that had disparaged black identity and marginalised indigenous knowledge.

In light of this I was surprised by the transparency with which co-researchers shared their stories and their understandings of foreigners. However, I have no way of knowing what they held back and did not tell me because of my whiteness. To the extent that they did not communicate certain stories or understandings with me it would create limitations for this study.

##### *8.1.1.1 My position in the stories told by co-researchers*

My position in relation to the Discourses reflected in co-researcher's stories is not neutral. While I have never experienced denigration or oppression because of my race, their lives have been lived under a dark cloud of racial oppression. Where they are poor, I am relatively rich; where they experience hunger and lack, those things are foreign to me. When they speak of inequality, I am on the other end of the spectrum to them. While I do not own any land, I am perceived by the co-researchers to be party to the theft of their land. We all experience South Africa as our home, but to some I am a foreigner because my ancestors came here from other countries.

My positions in the various stories told by co-researchers mean that I cannot claim neutrality or objectivity. I hope that by acknowledging my positioning as a researcher (as I have done in chapter 1 and elsewhere), and by reflecting on it, I have diminished the impact of my own story on the narrative described in this study.

#### *8.1.1.2 My voice versus their voices*

One of my concerns, when I began this journey of research, was that my own voice would dominate the voices of co-researchers. To mitigate this, I introduced regular feedback loops into the process of conducting interviews and documenting them. However, it is clear to me that, as much as I have tried to preserve the integrity of their stories, in trying to explore and understand their stories I have also introduced paradigms and knowledge that are alien to them.

While this research does represent a co-production of knowledge with the co-researchers in many respects, it is also a co-production of knowledge in conversation with the partners in the interdisciplinary conversation. There was a constant tension between meeting academic requirements for rigorous critical thinking and producing knowledge that was accessible to co-researchers. I was also aware that my voice might introduce 'expert' discourses that might be experienced as disempowering by the co-researchers.

### **8.1.2 Exile and belonging**

#### *8.1.2.1 My exile from the church*

As described in chapter 1, I began this research in a place of exile. I am in a position of exile from the church that had been my home for most of my life. I was aware of my own sense of homelessness and displacement throughout the research process. My own narratives of displacement and exile are very different from those of black South Africans or foreign migrants, and the ramifications of my displacement and exile are much less significant. However, my own experience enabled me to engage in reflection on the experience of being pushed aside.

Even in my very limited experience of displacement and exile, I experienced considerable trauma and emotional pain. As I reflect on this I cannot begin to imagine the trauma and pain experienced by those affected by apartheid. In addition to institutionalised oppression and dispossession, there is the deeply personal pain of being regarded as less than other humans. My reflections on my personal experience, and the impact it had on me, gave me

a high regard for the courage of the millions of poor, black South Africans who live with great dignity in spite of their terrible losses.

My own experience of exile was also a basis for empathy with migrants who have been forced to leave their homes and seek opportunities in a foreign country. The experience of being uprooted from a community and trying to start a new life in a different place is not easy. For me, it involved the loss of friends and the familiar, a struggle to start a new career, financial difficulties, and debt. It also precipitated a crisis of meaning about my life and its purpose.

I am careful not to conflate my own experiences and stories with those of others, particularly the co-researchers in this study, but I felt that my own experiences over the past seven years gave me insights into the stories of co-researchers that might not have otherwise been possible.

#### *8.1.2.2 My concerns about belonging in South Africa*

It was difficult to listen to narratives about foreigners and belonging without experiencing doubts about whether I belonged in South Africa. My sense of belonging was not a reaction to problems in the country, such as corruption or crime. Rather, it stemmed from the sense that my presence and my privilege constituted an ongoing offence to those marginalised and dispossessed by colonialism and apartheid.

The process of listening to co-researchers made me aware of the different things that I signify to them. This made me uncomfortable. At times I had a desire to escape the South African context because it felt as though the questions and challenges posed to me were overwhelming. I had no easy answers. I had no solutions. It felt tempting to agree that I do not belong here, and that by removing myself I might diminish the offence my presence caused - and my sense of complicity in this country's pain. At times, perhaps in an attempt to diminish my internal struggles and guilt, I found myself becoming quite cynical about South Africa. To the extent that I was able to decry the current state of the country, it seemed to shift blame and guilt from my own shoulders.

These emotions and struggles made this research an intensely personal process for me. It is a process that does not have any clear end, so it does not end with the submission of my thesis. The struggle of what whiteness and white privilege mean in South Africa, both in terms of culpability and responsibility, will undoubtedly remain with me for the rest of my life.

## **8.2 Reflections with the co-researchers**

### **8.2.1 Our voices have been heard**

When I asked the co-researchers what they valued most about their participation in this study they all agreed that they felt it had given them a voice. Their stories had been heard and valued. They were amazed at the possibility that their stories and struggles would be shared with people in other parts of the world through the publication of this thesis and in journal articles. Some of the co-researchers described this as feeling “noticed” – that their lives had been seen. It did not matter to them that this research would probably not bring about any kind of material change in their lives. They had been heard, their loss and pain had been seen, and their frustration had been acknowledged. I felt privileged to have played this role in their lives.

### **8.2.2 Nothing has changed**

While this research has been at the centre of my life and my thinking for the past four years, for the co-researchers it has been a sporadic interruption to the monotony of poverty.

Their circumstances are no different now to what they were at the time of the first interviews. There has been another election during the period of the research, and the same promises have been made, but there is increasing scepticism about the ability of the South African government to deliver on these promises. Levels of frustration are palpably higher. Where talk of some kind of revolution was at the periphery during the first interviews, by the end of the research process there was acceptance by most of the co-researchers that some kind of revolution was inevitable, if not desirable. This points to the danger of ignoring the widening inequality and widespread poverty in South Africa, and the need for collaborative solutions to problems that affect all South Africans.

### **8.2.3 Your people are a problem**

I asked the co-researchers if there had been anything that they had found difficult during the research process. Most of them said that they could not think of anything that was a problem, but five co-researchers said that my whiteness had made the research difficult. They added that this had nothing to do with me as an individual. I represented a group of South Africans who seemed blind to the conditions in which their fellow human beings lived. I belonged to a community who seemed disinterested in the country’s social problems and disengaged from people who were different to them. I was part of a group of

people who had a reputation for complaining loudly when inconvenience interfered with their lives of relative luxury and comfort.

This experience of five of the co-researchers echoed some of my own struggles during the course of this research.

### **8.3 Reflections on the research findings**

What if Nelson Mandela was wrong? A statement made by Mandela in his autobiography has been quoted widely as an inspirational challenge to prejudice, “No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite” (Mandela 1995:749). This research suggests that, as noble as these sentiments sound, they may not be accurate.

An evolutionary account of human rationality, such as that offered by Van Huyssteen, not only highlights the sense-making, problem-solving nature of rationality – it points to the development of rationality in a context where outsiders were inevitable a threat. As pointed out in chapter 6, antipathy towards outsiders was a mechanism for surviving in a hostile and challenging environment. For most of human history, people lived in small groups, with very limited contact with other groups. Where such contact occurred, other groups invariably represented a threat. Love for the ‘other’ is certainly not a natural outcome of human evolution. Evolutionary processes are more likely to produce strong identification with one’s own group.

If this is the case, it would seem more natural to expect intergroup conflict in a context of difference than to expect relationships characterised by mutual affection and care. It is possible that evolution has not equipped human beings adequately for a world characterised by increased contact with difference. It is beyond the scope of this research to argue for such a position, but in reflecting on the research I considered this as a possibility. I was curious about how it might change the way we approach prejudice and conflict.

My curiosity was increased by my sense that the Biblical narrative confirms such a view of fallen human nature - that it is more natural for us to sin and hate and destroy. It is only in Christ and through the work of the Spirit that our hearts are transformed and love for the ‘Other’ becomes natural.

If conflict between groups is inevitable, and differing group identities and interests are likely to be an ongoing source of conflict, then finding ways to deal constructively with such conflict becomes an essential task for humanity. In a world where intergroup conflict is likely to increase as the earth's population increases and resources are depleted, the church has an important role to play. It is uniquely positioned to facilitate social transformation at a level that is not achievable by means of social pressure, education, or calls for tolerance and harmony. God's story of redemption intersects with all of our local, human stories, challenging them and making new meanings possible. New meanings make different choices possible and different actions with different outcomes. However, it is only through the work of the Spirit that we are able to follow Jesus' radical command to not only love those who are good to us, but to also love those who are different – and more than that, to love our enemies!

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## APPENDIX A

### INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

#### INFORMATION LETTER FOR PHD RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

#### **Moving Beyond Difference, Threat Perception, and Prejudice: A Postfoundational, Narrative Approach**

**Researcher: John Eliastam**

**Contact details: 082 3709283 [john@smartchoices.co.za](mailto:john@smartchoices.co.za)**

I am doing research for a PhD degree in the Department of Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria. The purpose of this research is to listen to the stories of people about foreigners living in their communities, or in South Africa:

- What experiences of foreigners have they had?
- How do they view foreigners?
- How and why foreigners are seen as different to South Africans?
- Whether foreigners are seen as a problem, and why?

These stories and attitudes will be understood by making use of insights from a number of disciplines, such as theology, psychology, political science, and others.

Participation in the research will involve a number of interviews of about one hour in duration: one interview at the beginning of the research, one about a year later, and at least one at the planned conclusion of the research in early 2015.

Participants will not be paid anything for participating in the study.

All information given by participants will remain confidential, and names will be changed to protect the identity of people and organisations. Data that the research depends on will be retained for ten years.

Participation in the project is completely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage. If participants have any concerns or questions they can contact the researcher on the telephone number or email address above.

## CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

### **Moving Beyond Difference, Threat Perception, and Prejudice: A Postfoundational, Narrative Approach**

**Researcher: John Eliastam**

I have read the information letter and I am satisfied that I know what this research project is about.

I know that:

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage.
3. I am aware of what will happen to my personal information (including tape recordings) at the conclusion of the project, that the data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research project but that any raw data the project depends on, will be retained for ten years.
4. I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study.
5. All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential throughout the project.
6. I am aware that John's supervisor will read the material.

I hereby confirm that I am willing to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant.....

Signature of participant.....Date.....

## APPENDIX B

### LETTER TO INTERDISCIPLINARY CONVERSATION PARTNERS

Dear...

A while ago I asked if you would be willing to be part of an interdisciplinary conversation that forms part of my research. I'm using a narrative approach to listen to the stories of South Africans in relation to migrants from other parts of the world, and trying to explore the deeper meanings behind what has been called xenophobia.

The title of my research is: **Ubuntu as a discursive driver of social cohesion in South Africa. A pastoral-narrative approach to moving beyond difference, threat perception, and prejudice**

I'm approaching the issue as a practical theologian, but my research approach involves an interdisciplinary conversation. I've attached a transcript of an interview with one of my co-researchers. I would like you to reflect on it by answering four questions:

1. When reading the story of X, what are your *concerns*?
2. What do you think is your discipline's *unique perspective* on this story?
3. Why do you think your perspective will be *understood and appreciated* by people from other disciplines?
4. What would your major concern be if the perspective of your discipline *might not be taken seriously*?

I would need your answers by the end of January 2015.

Kind regards

John Eliastam

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE

Hlonelwa<sup>15</sup> is in her early thirties. She grew up in Mdantsane, and then spent a couple of years studying communication in Cape Town. She now lives in Mdantsane with her parents. She is currently unemployed.

*What were some of your early experiences of other cultures?*

Coming from the Eastern Cape, nobody tells you anything about other cultures. The only thing I knew was “Sotho people are stingy”.

*I suppose that the Sotho people are the closest neighbours to certain parts of the Eastern Cape*

Yes, and all we knew was that Sotho people are stingy (laughs). That’s just the stereotype we had, but, you know, it wasn’t an antagonistic thing, we weren’t very aware of other cultures in a negative sense. And then you would find that other people really had a conclusion about you as a Xhosa person, and just this very negative attitude and you’d, really, like, “Wow! Ok. I’m only saying ‘hello’, I haven’t even thought about you.”

*Did you wonder why that happens?*

First of all we’re coming from an Apartheid system where we had to live very separate from one another, and there was this system where, you know, if you’re a Xhosa you just have to stay in the Ciskei or Transkei – there was even division among Xhosa people themselves which also causes some trauma and rivalry. The government kept people divided to basically stop people from being able to come together and be a force because they were all separate in separate homelands. They were kept separate from one another and by separating them it created rivalry of some sort. To give you an example, I’m from the Eastern Cape and then I moved to the Western Cape and became a student in Cape Town and I remember being exposed to black culture other than my own, which is Xhosa. When you’re a student you come across lots of different people, you know, like Venda’s and Tswana’s and Sotho’s. Lots and lots of all the different cultures in South Africa, and it’s fascinating. But what I realised, when I got there as a Xhosa person, is that they already had a perception that they had learnt from where they come from of what a Xhosa person is.

They put you in this box and you just kind of feel as though you are a threat, but you don’t understand how you are a threat. Anyway, so I would say that is the first and theN I would say that later there were other experiences.

Last year I found that a friend of mine who went to school in Limpopo, she saw herself as a very tolerant person, however she was not very tolerant to Xhosas. And she learnt these things in her books, in her textbooks, it wasn’t just propaganda it was something right out of the text book, and I don’t know it all but it was like Xhosa people are thieves, and I don’t know.

*Really, so it was something that blatant in a textbook?*

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<sup>15</sup> Not her real name

Yes, and she learnt this, not just from her family culture but from the textbook, which is shocking but I understand that books can do that. I also realised that a friend of mine, who is coloured, a coloured friend from the Northern Cape, she said that in their textbooks they said horrible things about coloured people. You know, it's like coloured people are drunkards, or whatever, but they did say things in the text books, I just can't remember the exact detail of that. So she was schooled in the old system from the old days

*So there's this history of division and suspicion.*

Well for me, the reason I'm mentioning these roots is I'm showing that even among us, from the beginning there's been this division, so how are you going to respond to something bigger? With these suspicions and rivalry and you've been segregated so long and all of a sudden you have a crowd of people that you never encountered before who are coming into your space, a space that was only ever yours. And now there's people doing different things in it.

So I think it comes from that root of segregation and so obviously, people who come from different places and you've never heard about them, I think you start to feel insecure. And insecure because they seem like they don't have much, and they seem like (pause) and I think because the other people are more entrepreneurial they are (pause) umm I think people are also intimidated by that and they feel like, besides other issues, you know the jobs and crime and that I think that some if it might not be real but people feel threatened by these things.

*What have your personal experiences been when it comes to foreigners from other parts of Africa that are living here?*

I often get asked whether I am Zimbabwean by a white South African who meets me for the first time. It's only happened in Cape Town, usually in an all white Environment and some white person who meets you for the first time who will ask that question. It does not happen all the time but it happens. It often makes me mad because, seriously, I am in South Africa. I have never set foot in Zimbabwe and even if I had this is South Africa, a land full of many different kinds of blacks who actually belong here.

And what I've experienced as well is that because of that you have a lot of attitude. And what I've experienced is where I encounter lots of white people who compare black people, I think it comes from Apartheid as well, where they basically say that Zulus are better, or these people are better, and any person who is not a black South African is a better black.

And then where I live in East London I was speaking to an Afrikaans white friend who was telling me about her domestic help. One of her friends has only employed Zimbabweans in her business, and she was telling me about how a certain Zimbabwean fixed washing machines and sends them to Zimbabwe. She was very impressed by how industrious he was. She said it with a tone that said: "not like these blacks." And then she did say it, she said; "you know Zimbabweans are different, they are not like these people here."

*This comparison, between South African blacks and so called "better blacks", have you experienced this in the church as well as outside of the church? Is it the same everywhere?*

It's the same. It's not different.

*So Christian white people are as likely to think that and say that?*

I've probably heard it more from those white Christians, in fact all the people that I've heard make those comments are white Christians that I've come into contact with.

I suppose, maybe it's worse because they also travel to other countries, then they come back with those attitudes: why are those blacks better than these blacks? And obviously having people who only employ Zimbabweans...

I mean, I've been with a girl, a friend, and she doesn't look anything like Zimbabwean and people meet her and say "Oh, are you Zimbabwean?". I've encountered the same thing but it's good for me to see that other people have experienced that, who don't even look Zimbabwean themselves. There's this attitude that if you're like, maybe if you can hold some sort of intelligent conversation and you're well-spoken you must be Zimbabwean, because Zimbabweans are blacks who can really (pause) I don't know (pause) (pauses).

*So there's this idea among white people in SA that black South Africans can't be intelligent or well-spoken and articulate, and if someone is then they must be a Zimbabwean*

Yes, and I experienced that a lot more in Cape Town. And a friend of mine who was in the church with me, he was in a church group about ten years ago, a year mission/youth thing led by a young white couple and there were, you know, black people in the team, I'm sure there were white people too, but they experienced extreme racism from them, but Zimbabweans were treated better. They actually said, "Zimbabweans are better blacks" (laughs uneasily and then sighs).

*So someone actually said openly that Zimbabweans are better...*

She said it, she said it. She didn't just suggest it, she said it.

*Wow!*

That's why (pause) so (pause) I think she was being abusive to that person by saying this, and she was still racist towards them, but the Zimbabweans got better treatment because they were told they were the better blacks. They have heard South Africa is racist and there are fears when they come here that they will experience racism, but then they are surprised to be treated differently. And that's one of the things they used to say which, ja, which is interesting.

*Ja. I have also come across that kind of attitude in white communities where there is this perception that maybe Malawians work better, or Zimbabweans are better workers.*

Yes, and it's a very bad attitude and I think it's that attitude that definitely fuels xenophobia. I think the favouritism and the better treatment that are shown by white South Africans shown to non-South African blacks, it is I think something that makes black South Africans resent those, you know, foreigners.

*When that happens, what does that message say to you as a black South African about your identity or your worth? What message are you getting from white South Africans from that comparison?*

Well for me it's like it's a residual of Apartheid. It's just another thing that's left from the system of Apartheid. It just says we don't accept you. Apartheid was this rejection of black people. Even though black people were used, for the benefit of whites, at the same you

were still useful. What I'm saying is, now it's probably a worse form of rejection because not it's "I reject you and I've now found a better person to use".

*Yeah...I hear that...as you're talking I'm kind of cringing inside. So what's happening with this comparison is like a second, and even deeper wound to your identity*

It goes even further than what Apartheid or colonialisation was about and it just strikes deeper: "You're worthless!"

So I think it's very wounding even though I don't think there's a lot of people that think about it, but I think it's so deeply hurtful to the people. And obviously is it's black – other people from different African countries that are seen as better - it's obviously also a rejection of ourselves.

*Ja*

It just shows how much we don't prize ourselves because I think our hearts are naturally to welcome people and the fact that we find it so hard to embrace people from the rest of Africa I think it's saying something about us rejecting ourselves. We've lost something of who we are.

*That's a profound thing that you're saying, that there's a rejection of self in all of this. That there is a loss of who you are, a loss of how you would choose to live. If one thinks of a rich cultural value like ubuntu that seems so central to African life, it feels as though ubuntu has been diluted in some way. I don't know what you think of that.*

Ubuntu should include people from the outside; Ubuntu includes everything I'm doing. I don't want to lie though, I live in the townships, in Mdantsane and I've been away and when I came back I was shocked, you know foreign shops have moved into houses. I thought they were just in Cape Town but they are here too. I was shocked. They are in the rural Transkei, I mean it's really...a lot of it's overwhelming for me. I think, also, the change is overwhelming. It's like nobody transitions us from the past where we had all of this to ourselves and so I think just this change has been very shocking. It hasn't been gradual. It hasn't been gradual in terms of "in my generation it was like this" and now it's become like that. It's been within...I mean I'm still under 35 but I've experienced all this: Apartheid, the change from Apartheid to the new South Africa, and then I'm still shocked when I come back to Mdantsane and see how much the community has changed and there are these different people that we have to get used to (pause) Really, I can't explain it to you but it's a shock to our system.

*Do you think other people in your community feel the same kind of shock?*

I think definitely

*Do people talk about it?*

They don't speak about it but I think it comes out in xenophobia

*So it's under the surface*

Yes, I think we've not all been able to process it, but there's been this shocking change, ummm and the feeling is (pause) I do believe that Apartheid did also play a role in how it set us up for the changes

All of a sudden, you're not even getting Zulus or Sothos, you're getting people who live a bit further

*Ja*

All of a sudden there are all these people coming into your space, and you're like, "Hang on, can I have my space?"

It's obviously very bad that people reacted so badly, but you have to see how they live. I remember going...I stayed there in Cape Town and I went to a township close to Muizenberg, I can't remember what it was called. But do you know what, I felt so terrible there. I just couldn't deal with it, being in that space in that kind of township – it's claustrophobic and if you think about where people come from, they usually come from rural areas, where there's lots of space. And, ummm and in the rural areas I don't know of any foreigner being attacked – but there are foreigners though

*Ja, and while there may have been resentment towards them, they weren't attacked in the rural areas*

The attacks were in the concentrated township areas where the people from the other tribes live on top of locals

In the townships it's a very restricted space and because people come from different cultures and I think because they come from so far they haven't been conditioned to colonialism or (pause) some of them have come from colonialism, but I don't know maybe colonialism wasn't as bad as apartheid. It didn't concentrate on conditioning people to doubt themselves as much

*Yes*

So you have people coming from countries that were previously colonised, they are able to still create something. In a lot of colonial countries people were given skills. And with Apartheid the system hasn't given us enough to make you and industrious person, you're always the servant.

*Ja*

They didn't want you to become powerful, because if you became powerful you would take over. And so, now I think we have all these people coming here, and they have shops, and they find ways to do the shops better and cheaper, and they put local businessmen out of business because they are getting cheaper stuff and selling them cheaper. And that creates a lot of resentment, and it's also changed our communities. So where there we like decent clean shops, now there are these spaza shops that do not belong to the people who once owned them because they have been put out of business. Umm (pause) and that creates (pause) it's uneasy every time you go and buy. You're very aware that someone has been pushed aside and displaced – which is really the same pain that comes from Apartheid and colonialism. You've been pushed out of your space and your life has been taken out of your hands.

The displacing of people, even if it's now their businesses, it kind of feeds into the pain of Apartheid. It's become a monster. We've been pushed from our community, and we're always losing out. We're the losers. We just keep losing. Your land, you've lost respect, all

of that, and it just keeps happening, even in freedom. And now, because these are new guys... It's difficult to take out that frustration on white people because white people have been there, they've been part of your lives, you're used to them now. Whether you like it or not they are there. It's always been a frustration, but we've been conditioned to accept it as part of our lives. Whereas with foreign nationals, it's like it's still new and there are no rules, and we can really take out centuries of frustration on them.

So I think it's a very complex thing. It's not just simple that people are being bad

*Yes, the word you used was that it's a monster. It was birthed in Apartheid: separation and suspicion and displacement and exploitation, and its fed by current situations of economic competition for jobs and competition for space.*

Ja, and they will just blame the foreigners. And I think that some of it is about corruption, I mean there's the rumour that foreign nationals were voting and I don't know how true that is, or if it's a rumour, or what but that kind of thing is there and if you believe it you'll be very hateful towards foreigners. And then you'll hear that they are also getting child grants and that makes people so angry.

*Ja*

So there's a lot of hatred, but again it comes from the idea that these people are taking from us all these things, how can they take child grant too? Like they've taken everything else already. You know, why are they taking child grant?

*Ja*

I have to say I'm very impressed with aah (pause) I don't know, I feel like there is a lot of hatred, but I travel in taxis and I find Eastern Cape people very, very kind – even towards foreigners. To the point that even the foreigners (pause) I prefer the foreigners in the Eastern Cape to the foreigners in the Western Cape. I know they all come from the same places, but in terms of how they are, here they almost feel like they've taken the nature of the kindness of the people that they live among.