

**Exploring ubuntu language in bridging gaps: a narrative
reflection on discussions between members of two
Reformed Churches in a rural town of South Africa**

By

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This dissertation would not have come into existence without the goodwill and dedication of the research participants. They opened up themselves and their community to me in different ways: by making their homes available; by giving their time; by filling me in on background stories; by welcoming my family and me; and by generously sharing their precious narratives with me and with each other. I will always remember each participant reverently - I have learnt a lot from him or her.

Abstract

Discussions with members of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in Ohrigstad, illustrate the possibilities of ubuntu language in dealing with misunderstanding and distrust.

This research utilises a narrative approach, based on a postmodern epistemology and pastoral practical theology that explores ubuntu language as a helpful discourse. It engages the context of these two churches in Ohrigstad and investigates experiences and challenges within the local community. The local experiences are described against the broader history of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, which the Ohrigstad churches are imbedded in.

Individual narrative research conversations with church members in Ohrigstad display a longstanding relationship with stories of trust and distrust. This culminates into a group discussion that explores the role of ubuntu language - and at times the lack thereof - in the concrete relationship between these two faith communities as an expression of recent South African history. The conversations offer local knowledge which displays both unique outcomes by strengthening identity, unleashing potential, celebrating diversity, awakening solidarity, revealing humanity, bolstering responsibility and enhancing Christianity, and it also deconstructs oppressive discourses including race and otherness, rich and poor, and language.

The research offers an approach to deal with distrust and misunderstanding on grass roots level, using insights gained from ubuntu language.

Key words

Ubuntu language; narrative research; postmodern epistemology; post structural; social construction; discourse; postmodern theology; prophetic theology; local knowledge; cultural hegemony; apartheid; Belhar Confession; Dutch Reformed Church; Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; interdisciplinary conversation.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

What did apartheid take from us? Friendship, each other's friendship - that we can know, understand and be involved with each other...

Anton, a research participant: October 2015.

The relationship between the Dutch Reformed Church¹ and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa² is closely connected to the history of South Africa, including 150 years of separation along racial lines between the two churches. The DRC's involvement in the practice of apartheid, especially the theological argument which the church had over many years developed and defended, was painful to URCSA and often put relationships between the churches under severe strain. Eventually in the 1990s the DRC did come to the point of recognising the error of its ways, confessing the sin and heresy of apartheid, and apologising for the pain and humiliation the church had caused. But that the road to reconciliation and forgiveness would be long and demanding, was clear for all to see.

South Africa's first democratic election in 1994 officially marked the end of apartheid and the beginning of a new era for the country. As a white minister in the DRC, I have been ordained shortly after that. I grew up in a white church, and as a child of apartheid, I did not have much contact with black people - I did not know how black people lived, or how they experienced life. Although things are different now - white and black children go to school together, and white and black people work together on equal terms - in many Dutch Reformed congregations not much has changed. The DRC and its black sister church, URCSA, are still two separate churches in spite of many

¹ Throughout this study, I use the abbreviation DRC for the Dutch Reformed Church

² Throughout this study, I use the abbreviation URCSA for the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

attempts to heal the sins of the past, and to reunite the church into one body. It means that in the DRC and URCSA, black and white Christians seldom have the opportunity to share their faith, to pray together and to get to know one another on a spiritual level. For both black and white members, this causes an obstacle to fully experiencing God, and also impedes an understanding of each other.

In 2000, I did narrative research with white DRC members who had to adapt to the new South Africa after apartheid. My research ³ had a narrative, pastoral approach. The participants experienced despair and shock after confronted with the revelations before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission about the gross atrocities committed in the name of apartheid. They also felt guilt for not knowing, or not wanting to know, about the violations of human rights that occurred in order to secure a privileged life for white people in South Africa. During the research, the DRC members were challenged to work through these issues in order to take responsibility for the past and to reach out to black South Africans.

After completing the above research, I decided to continue with the process, by conducting narrative conversations in a pastoral way between black and white members of URCSA and the DRC, in order for them (us) to come to a better understanding of each other. In 2006, I attended a joint discussion between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. Prof Julian Müller (my promoter for this research) facilitated the conversation in a narrative manner. During the conversation, I was struck by the trusting relationship between the respective members of the group, which benefited the poor, black community. I also noticed a number of challenges that had to be faced, especially the unwillingness of a conservative group within the DRC to enter

³ As part of an MTh study, the research was presented in a thesis, titled: "Renouncing racism in a Dutch Reformed congregation".

into a new relationship, as well as the issue of financial inequality, which hindered an equal relationship between URCSA and the DRC. Participants in the discussion were eager to overcome these challenges.

After six years, Prof Müller contacted me, impressing upon me the need for further research, to study and evaluate the evolving relationship between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. Correspondence he had with the then minister of the DRC, showed that the efforts of co-operation between the two churches were ongoing, but that a conservative group in the DRC put strain on the relationship.

I decided to conduct individual and group narrative conversations with members of both churches in Ohrigstad to explore the relationship. Prof Müller also invited me to become involved with the Ubuntu Project of the University of Pretoria's Centre for Institutional Advancement. The project did research on the meaning and value of ubuntu in human and social development in Africa. I joined the theology research cluster, under leadership of Prof Müller, and the possibilities of ubuntu gave me a perspective from which to commence the research conversations.

1.1 Need for and significance of the study

In the South African context, the questions of racism, inequality, distrust and misunderstanding are as important as ever. Discussions in the media, events on campuses and political discourse in an election year led to numerous projects on enduring racism in the country being launched. For the church, it is important to challenge the discourse of racism and cultural hegemony on grass roots level, if the church and its members want to be part of the solution.

In addition, the relationship between the DRC and URCSA has often been a relationship of haves and have-nots. One-sided financial aid - although well intentioned - engendered inequality and feelings of inferiority among the disadvantaged. Likewise, diversity in South Africa, with different cultures and languages, is celebrated for its vibrancy, but it often leads to distrust and misunderstanding.

The DRC and URCSA, which represent both these groups, may play a significant role in confronting these issues.

1.2 The Research question

The primary research question is: Can ubuntu language assist us in bridging the gap between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad?

Ubuntu language in this study signifies a way of life in which individuals consider their own being, duties, privileges and responsibilities through others. While conducting narrative conversations with individuals and in a group, the research question guided me to explore ubuntu language in the relationship between the members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. It directed me in exploring the possibilities of ubuntu language in reinforcing a fragile connection.

The narrative approach to the research conversations assisted the research participants and me to construct meaning from their experiences. Conducting

the research in a pastoral manner, indicates that I realised that the members of the group would be emotionally and spiritually impacted by the discussions, and would need to be guided and supported throughout the process, leading all of us to a new understanding.

1.3 The secondary research questions

In the research process, the secondary research questions as discussed below, directed me to a “thick description” (Geertz 1973: 3-30) of the relationship between URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad, with its context and complexities.

1.3.1 Research questions regarding the theoretical framework

- **What difference can a postmodern worldview make where exclusion and distrust obstruct authentic relationships?**

According to Thomas Kuhn, the understanding of knowledge is continuously evolving. He suggests that natural and social sciences do not grow cumulatively, but by way of revolutions - when existing models of knowledge show anomalies or are unable to solve emerging problems, a “new” paradigm develops (Kuhn 1970:82; 84). Kuhn describes a paradigm as “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by members of a given community” (1970:175). Other scholars refer to this concept as frames of knowledge (Torrance), models of interpretation (Küng), frames of reference (Van Huyssteen), research traditions or belief systems (Hiebert) (Bosch 1991:185).

Modernism, based on Rene Descartes's notion that reason constitutes a person (*cogito ergo sum*), is a paradigm that put reason's meaning and morality in authority over traditional resources like culture, specific codes, beliefs and collective history (Van der Merwe 2015: 6).

Stemming from the nineteenth century enlightenment, a modernist worldview understands knowledge as a universal, all-encompassing truth. Its positivistic position holds that people can be organised according to precise knowledge and structures. This can lead to racial, social and gender oppression. When a modernist paradigm is confronted with different cultures, the "other" culture is not perceived as equal, because of its unscientific nature, language and beliefs. Modernism provided the basis for the idea that the non-Western world, specifically the people of Africa, had nothing of great value to offer (Cloete 2012:120).

As the natural sciences evolved, and with the possibility of studying matter on subatomic level, gaps became visible in modernist thinking. A philosophical paradigm shift, firstly inspired by Nietzsche, started to question the idea of "universal truth" (Cloete 2012:118). This led to a postmodern approach that deals with truth, knowledge and reason differently. In this study, I opt for a postmodern approach, as much of the events that occurred in the broad historical context were influenced by a modernist worldview. A postmodern approach does not reject modern assumptions of scientific knowledge, expertise or progress; it only attempts to revise the modernist view of truth and knowledge (Papps & Olssen 1997:37). It only rejects truth in particular as an "exclusive notion" (Du Toit 1997:942). Truth as such is not rejected, but the boundaries of truth claims as well as the conditions under which they operate are recognised. A postmodern approach offers what Ricoeur calls a pragmatic historiography, which "tries not to separate representations from the practices by which social agents set up the social bond and include multiple identities within it" (Ricoeur 2004:229).

Our beliefs about the world are social inventions - it is not a reflection or map of the world, but an artefact of communal interchange (Gergen 1985:266; Hoffman 1990:2).

The social construction discourse assumes that our knowledge about the world is socially constructed (Gergen 1985:266). It challenges the objective basis of conventional knowledge, identifies discourses and invites new possibilities. It invites us to enter into dialogue with undisclosed traditions and wisdom of other cultures (Van der Merwe: 1015:8). It values human participation - especially from those who are marginalised - as essential to knowledge of an external world (Maturana & Varela 1992:245). The poststructural view on discourse, which is associated with a postmodern paradigm, reveals and deconstructs oppressive knowledge discourses in society. Two proponents of the poststructural view (which I discuss in Chapter Two) are Foucault and Derrida.

In this research, a postmodern positioning towards knowledge compelled me to seek alternative knowledge in the narratives of ordinary members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. The research attempted to find new meaning as socially constructed by the research participants. In doing so, discourses that exclude and cause distrust were challenged and alternative, more constructive possibilities were revealed.

- **What possibilities does a postmodern practical theology present in discussions about stuck discourses?**

The orientation of this research is that of intercultural pastoral theology, which finds its place in practical theology.

Richard Osmer (1997:66; 67) states that the rational orientation of practical theology, or the rationality of discernment, is “a form of rationality that attempts to provide reasons for how and why to perform an action or practice in a manner that corresponds to and participates in the praxis of God.” According to Charles Gerkin (1986: 22), pastoral, practical theology finds its task in “the practical reality of situations that call for pastoral response. It is always a theology that emerges from reflection on a practical situation.”

Gerkin (1986:12) argues that pastoral practical theology has the task of being continuously open to changes in the way that people understand their needs and difficulties, and, on the other hand, being open to the shifts that occur in the meaning of knowledge. The paradigm shift from modernism to a postmodern understanding of knowledge set in motion a change in contemplating the meaning of theological knowledge.

As I describe in Chapter Three, knowledge about the Bible and about God is based on objective truths in a modernist worldview. Faith needs to be rationally plausible, because theology can only justify its place in the curricula of universities if it adopts the same scientific method as the other academic disciplines (Bosch 1995:17). This becomes problematic, in that modernist thinking knows only a reality that is accessible through sensory perception, and hence it does not include human subjectivity, presuppositions and aspirations as part of reality. This leads to a fragmentation between the church and the secular world, which are in two completely unrelated categories. Religion then, is regarded as a set of dogmas that makes no difference in society as a whole (Bosch 1995:18). Meaning becomes lost, because values and transcendent reality do not lend itself to scientific verification. Heroldt (1998:216) claims that such an emotionally sterile and rather clinical framework is obviously not suitable for theological reflection that has to

cater for religious needs that include the so-called “fuzzy world” of visions, hopes and beliefs.

A postmodern theology places the emphasis on theological knowledge as social constructs. Over a period, the conviction grew among critical theologians that environment conditioned theology. In a sense, every text is an interpreted text. Reading is not merely a literary process but also a social, economic and political exercise (Pieterse 1995:102). Knowledge is not simply set in reason; instead, meaning derives from human and cultural practices (Schweiker 2000:136). Faith communities with its particular beliefs and practices are the result of a communal construction of knowledge, reality, meaning and truth (Gobbel & Ridenhour 1993:81). Pieterse (1996:63) states that a postmodern sensibility has a clear aim of disrupting dominant identities which charade as normality, and universal truths or dogmas are looked at critically.

A postmodern practical theology offers alternative ways of thinking and being for the church in South Africa, and for conducting research. It emphasises the following:

Meaning derives from communities of knowledge

Human participation is integral in a postmodern practical theology. Humans create understanding within communities of knowledge, and the question asked in spiritual formation is “who are we?” rather than “what do we believe?” (Rossouw 1993:901). A practical theologian would then for instance be more interested in the meaning of biblical narratives in a specific community, than abstract definitions (Heroldt 1998:220). Viewing religious knowledge as relative to people’s experiences, invokes an awakening to community life in exchange for

individual control (Heroldt 1998:218). In this research, the meanings of people's experiences were co-constructed in conversations between the research participants and me; and between research participants in conversation with each other.

Interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue

Practical theology does not stand isolated from other theological disciplines, nor from other so-called secular disciplines. Gerkin (1986:60) states that practical theology is intrinsically interdisciplinary and multilingual, while retaining its identity in theological narrative. As reality is multi-layered, and because all disciplines are concerned with patterns and complex systems, there is a reopening of interdisciplinary dialogue between different disciplines (Heroldt 1998:228). The disciplines and methods are on equal footing, and this makes mutual enrichment possible. In a postmodern context, both theology and natural sciences acknowledge that reality cannot be fully known. In dialogue with other disciplines, a better coherence and more authentic theological statements are made possible (Heroldt 1998: 228). On the other hand, an overestimation of one's own discipline and culture and its possibilities - where the other's point of view is merely integrated in one's own domain of knowledge - is curbed (Müller 2009:4).

A postmodern practical theology understands that knowledge is not an objective truth, but something that is socially constructed. This allows for different cultures and discourses to converse. In this study, practical theology went into dialogue with the ubuntu discourse, and people from different cultures created meaning together.

In the research, the words of Gerkin (1986:63) regarding the fusion of horizons were presupposed:

Respect for other horizons necessitates taking care to allow the language symbols and metaphors of those horizons to speak for themselves, to ask the questions which those languages express more directly and clearly, to express the truth that they reveal.

Contextual practice

Postmodern theological reflection and practice do not search for meaning from a general and ahistorical point of view. It starts within an immediate social context. It starts at a particular point in our own time and place, and responds to practical questions raised by humans in their specific culture (Gerkin 1986:21:22). This research commenced with conversations with specific members of the DRC and URCSA who live in the town of Ohrigstad, and who each has his/her own narrative. A postmodern practical theology also involves the broad contexts and traditions that form the meanings persons give to their narratives. The research explores the broader context of the DRC and URCSA within post-apartheid South Africa, which informs the narratives of the church members in Ohrigstad. In accordance with a postmodern pastoral practice, the research not only reflects on the themes, metaphors and meanings of the in-context narratives; it also “looks ahead and involves imaginative possibilities for one or another future” (Gerkin 1986: 42).

A prophetic orientation

Within a postmodern practical theology, ethical accountability exceeds empirical evidence in research, as well as in the way the church conducts itself in the world (Venter 2012:65). Christians are challenged by the cross of Christ to live a life of love, which has to be practiced in

history and involve itself in the politics of justice (De Gruchy 1993:67). This prophetic orientation pays attention to the special concern displayed in Scripture for the marginalised (Rossouw 1993:902). The expression of practical theology's prophetic task in the world includes an awareness of dominance over persons and the abuse of power (Gerkin 1991:163; Balcomb 1998:63; Poling 1996:15). In the research conversations, care was taken to hear the voices of those who were marginalised in the community on different levels. Oppressive discourses that contributed to problem experiences were revealed and in a joint conversation between the participants, these discourses were addressed.

A narrative approach

In a postmodern approach to practical theology, the recovery of storylike language in pastoral care, and in research is significant. Gerkin (1986:29) says the following about stories:

We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. In order to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.

A narrative approach in practical theology asks questions concerning how situations and people's actions in those situations are to be interpreted (Gerkin 1986:22). It takes into account that meanings are always grounded in the narratives of humans, as well as in the traditions of meaning (for example biblical narratives), and taken for granted roles and relationships that inform these narratives (Gerkin 1986:65). Narrative research and pastoral care is a constant process of exploring human stories, which are embedded in the narrative about

God. The narratives are not only described - the interpretations thereof are told and retold in order to open it up to creative possibilities (Gerkin 1986:54).

An intercultural pastoral position

This research is concerned with intercultural communication from a pastoral viewpoint. Pastoral theology or what Browning (2000:91) appropriately calls a "practical theology of care", has been marked by a history of oppression for black members of society and by status, power and privilege for most white members in South Africa (Cochrane; De Gruchy & Petersen 1991:1). It is against a historical context of injustice and cultural and language differences that I conducted the research conversations. At the start, it seemed problematic, as it would place me in a superior and powerful position because I am white, and in modernist reasoning, the pastoral researcher has often been the expert on the Bible and the person who controlled the relationship (Müller & Pienaar 2004:1031). The question Martin Forward (2000: 251) rightly asks about churches and parsons is also true for the researcher: how do we give a sense of power within society to people of different cultures, religions and racial groups?

A narrative approach to pastoral research where the research participant is the expert of his or her own life may be helpful in deconstructing power relationships (Müller & Pienaar 2004:1032). The narrative approach respects the people who receive care, recognises the uniqueness of each participant and is sensitive to cultural differences (Müller & Stone 1998:329). The role of the pastoral researcher is to "encourage in the background" towards new possibilities (Müller 1998:330). The researcher is in a "not knowing" position, listening attentively while searching for unique outcomes. Müller (1998:333) states: "Pastoral caregiving using narrative therapy

wants to experience the sensation of being drawn into the other's world, of being drawn over the threshold of cultural difference". While the mutual co-authoring of a new story emerges, the pastoral researcher's role must be that of servant (in biblical terms), rather than the one being in control (Müller & Stone 1998:333; 334). In this sense, moving on "cultural borderlands" (Müller & Stone 1998:339; 340) can be a respectful, positive experience.

The prophetic stance of a postmodern practical theology with its concern for justice and social transformation is useful in intercultural pastoral research in that it reveals and addresses power imbalances between researcher and participant (Müller & Pienaar 2004:1031). It also creates awareness of social injustice and power discourses in society that influence participants' narratives.

- **Can ubuntu language be a discourse that provides new possibilities?**

A literature study of ubuntu - focusing on the Nguni use of the word - explores ubuntu language as a social discourse. Ubuntu language presents both useful and closed possibilities (restorative and reflexive nostalgia).

In the Ohrigstad conversations, ubuntu language involved possibilities such as identity, vitality, solidarity, responsibility and the prophetic office of the church.

1.3.2 Research questions regarding the historical context

- **What is the broad historical context in which the DRC and URCSA of Ohrigstad find itself?**

An exploration of the history of South Africa shows how events continue to present political, social and economic challenges to the community of Ohrigstad. In addition, the ecclesiastical history - including protest from within both churches and the Confession of Belhar - continues to influence the relationship between the DRC and URCSA.

- **What do narrative conversations with members of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad reveal about their current history in terms of ubuntu language?**

Narrative conversations recount a bond over decades, manifested in both personal relationships and community projects between the DRC and URCSA. It reveals recent frustration with a break in relations due to discourses of racism, cultural hegemony and an individualistic theology. The conversations also offer ways forward through ubuntu language.

1.3.3 Research question regarding bridging gaps

- **Can ubuntu language bridge gaps in a narrative group discussion between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad?**

In this research, a group discussion between members of the DRC and URCSA provided stories of hopelessness and suffering in the URCSA

community. URCSA and DRC participants shared narratives of frustration caused by obstacles in the way of a healthy community. On the other hand, they also shared narratives about their experiences of ubuntu language in Ohrigstad. Telling stories about their own lives stimulated ubuntu language as identity and solidarity in the group, which made it possible to discuss sensitive issues. Barriers such as language and the gap between rich and poor were not solved, but the local knowledge of the group created ways to deal with these issues. Ubuntu language in the group allowed the participants to explore alternative narratives of widening community and humanity. Without taking anything away from the heart wrenching narratives of hopelessness and difficulty, new possibilities emerged, which empowered participants to practically take responsibility for a revived relationship.

1.4 Objectives of this study

The aim of this research was to describe conversations with church members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. I explored the relationship between the two churches, and how white and black Christians living in this rural town in post-apartheid South Africa experienced each other. I looked for ubuntu language in the research conversations, and I discovered how the possibilities thereof could assist participants in moving forward in their relationships.

In order to understand the context of the participants' narratives, I investigated the wider historical background of the DRC and URCSA in South Africa. I also explored the immediate historical context of Ohrigstad in which the relationship of URCSA and DRC members is imbedded.

The research conversations were conducted in a qualitative manner. Qualitative interviewing is not interested in categorising people in terms of academic theories. Rubin & Rubin (1995: 2, 6) states that qualitative interviewing is an intentional way of learning about people's feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

In order to put this into practice, I opted for a narrative research approach. This is a process where the researcher and the participant jointly construct meaning through their narratives, which are lived out in a collaborative setting. By telling their own stories and ideas relevant to them, participants are co-researchers in the venture. The stories told by co-researchers reach further than mere descriptions of experiences – they give meaning to the experiences. In this research, I was especially interested in the co-researchers' interpretation of their own stories (Müller 2003: 302).

Although the aim of this study was to explore the possibilities of ubuntu language in the relationship between black and white church members in Ohrigstad, the research went further, providing its own dynamics. The different stories of the research participants developed into a new understanding, where negative discourses were deconstructed. The aim was for the new story that emerged to give new meaning to the reader, but the findings still had to be grounded in the experiences and understanding of the co-researchers (Müller 2003:304; Rubin & Rubin 1995:63).

According to Rubin & Rubin (1995:56), the research participants' joint construction of meaning, motivates people to bring about social change. The narrative research conversations enabled participants to work with alternative ways of being and thinking, and helped to reveal the unstated cultural assumptions that contributed to the original construction of misunderstanding (Monk et al 1996:8).

The data for the collaboratively lived narratives involved field notes of the shared experience and interview transcripts of discussions between the researcher and co-researchers, and the stories shared (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:265).

1.5 Description of the research approach

1.5.1 A qualitative study with co-researchers

The traditional understanding of the research interview is grounded in a masculine, positivist paradigm. This paradigm encompasses a number of assumptions, including a unidirectional flow of information from interviewee to interviewer, the sovereignty of objectivity, and the value of decontextualizing and depersonalising the interview relationship. This paradigm, however, is problematic in that it embodies the assumed passive role of the “subjects” of the research (Limerick et al 1996:449).

Keith Ballard (1994:311) states that research is often undertaken in order to provide information that can be used in policy and practice, but qualitative research takes a different approach: “It involves researchers in the critical appraisal of current policies and practices with the immediate intention to change them. The processes of evaluation and of implementation change the research”. Lived experience is central to qualitative inquiry, and the criteria of evaluation in qualitative research is based on ethics of caring, personal responsibility, and open dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:102).

Virginia Olesen (1994:166) argues that in qualitative research there is the assumption of intersubjectivity between researcher and participant and the mutual creation of data: “In a certain sense, participants are also doing research, for they, along with the researcher, construct the meanings that become ‘data’ for later interpretation by the researcher”.

In this research, I conducted qualitative research conversations with individual members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. The individuals were co-researchers, whose stories depicted the recent historical context of their relationship. Together, the participants and I searched for ubuntu language in their stories. We tried to establish the meanings of their different experiences, and searched for possibilities for change. The individual conversations flowed into a group conversation between members of URCSA and the DRC. By sharing their experiences with each other in the group conversation, the participants jointly co-constructed narratives of caring and of taking responsibility. My role in the group conversation was not only to facilitate, but also to temporarily become part of this community of knowledge. Rubin & Rubin (1995: 19) states that in their approach to qualitative interviews, there are three guiding themes:

First, successful qualitative interviewing requires an understanding of culture. Culture affects what is said and how the interview is heard and understood. Second, interviewers are not neutral actors, but participants in an interviewing relationship. Their emotions and cultural understandings have an impact on the interview. Thirdly, the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to hear and understand what the interviewees think and to give them public voice.

In the research conversations, I listened to the co-researchers as they described how they comprehended their experiences from within their different cultures. The participants shared their accounts of what it meant for them to be white or black Christians in South Africa, and how they understood each other. My aim was to explore their knowledge, without imposing my world on theirs. I suggested the topics for discussion, but asked few specific questions - the participants lead the way with their own stories and explanations (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 5).

In the conversations, I had certain knowledge of research, but the participants' narratives and local knowledge were the central information for the research. Michael White (1995:72) states that researchers always have to put their "expert" knowledge in brackets. The co-researchers will then feel less imposed upon in the conversation. If a researcher has a strong opinion about what a person should or should not do, it is better to deconstruct this opinion immediately, otherwise the co-researchers may feel that they have no choice but to submit to one's opinion (White 1995:69).

As a white, female, Afrikaans speaking minister in an urban Dutch Reformed congregation, I also have a positioning towards issues stated in the research conversations. A qualitative researcher, however, must be careful not to dominate the interview. It is important to keep in mind that one person's experience is not more correct than another's experience. If I, as the researcher, discover different opinions about the same event, and different opinions from my own, I must recognise that all the different opinions may be right (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 10). The aim is to hear multiple sides of a story. I listened intensely, and listened again, to each co-researcher's narrative.

According to Rubin & Rubin (1995: 39), qualitative interviewing emphasizes the ability to transcend cultural and social boundaries, but Mishler (1986: 64) warns that meanings in discourse are not singular and fixed. Words take on specific and contextually grounded meanings. These meanings are shaped by the speaker in his/her specific context. Indeed, I did not share all the experiences of white or black members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. In the research conversations, there were some ideas and interpretations I was not sure of. I endeavoured to pay attention to the symbols and metaphors used. I continuously asked co-researchers to explain the meaning of terms, ideas, events and conducts.

1.5.2 A narrative approach

Müller (2003:295) states that a narrative approach to research compels us to be confronted with the specific and concrete situation of participants. Narrative research listens to the stories of people struggling in real circumstances, and not merely to a description of a general context.

A narrative approach does not imply only relating stories. Human beings are interpretive beings - we are active in the interpretation of our experiences as we live our lives (White 1995:13). We live by the stories we have about our lives, and these stories are continually shaping our lives. The narratives of our lives provide frames that enable us to interpret our experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly (1991:265) argue that narrative, qualitative inquiry involves a process where the researcher and the participant jointly live out their narratives. In this research, by sharing their own stories with me and with each other, the participants' stories were lived out in a collaborative setting. This was especially true in the group discussion, where meaning was co-constructed by the members.

The narrative approach gives a voice to the co-researchers. The narrative questions I posed were not rhetorical or pedagogical questions, and I did not demand specific answers to questions (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:34; Müller 2003: 295). Narrative questions create space, and facilitate a mode conducive to dialogue. The co-researchers were invited to tell their stories in their own way, and they controlled the topics raised (Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001: 4). To ensure that the co-researchers' voices were heard, I put myself in a *not knowing* position. A not knowing position assumes that the co-researcher is the expert on his/her own experience (Anderson and Goolishian

1992:28). My skill as the researcher was the expertise to participate in creating new meaning (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28).

Curiosity can be regarded as one safeguard against the use of researcher expertise to steer the co-researchers in the direction that the researcher deems appropriate (Monk et al 1996:26). A natural curiosity about the experiences of church members in Ohrigstad, gave rise to questions that highlighted new possibilities for the co-researchers to consider (Monk et al 1996:26). An attitude of curiosity enabled me to stay in a not knowing position. It prevented me from moving too quickly to a “quick fix” (Monk et al 1996:26), and it showed the wealth of the participants’ local knowledge.

Narrative research does not only explore the problem areas of life, but also the possible alternative story (Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001:3). Narrative interviewing, according to White (1995:13), provides a context that contributes to the exploration of other, more preferred ways of living and thinking. At the same time, narrative discussions enable us to re-dress cultural injustice. The narratives shared by the co-researchers in Ohrigstad enabled them to reveal the unstated cultural assumptions that contributed to the original construction of misunderstanding (Monk et al 1996:8). As these assumptions were deconstructed, new possibilities emerged.

In this research, *externalising conversations* assisted in naming injustices and misunderstandings in a non-blaming way, which opened up ways for taking responsibility. Externalising conversations remember that “the problem is the problem; the person is not the problem” (Monk et al 1996:26). White (1992:126) states that a narrative researcher has to have an externalising attitude while deconstructing race related problems. Naming the problematic story of cultural hegemony is useful in externalising the problem. Asking

relative influence questions is a way to structure externalising conversations: co-researchers of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad were asked to map the influence that race, misunderstanding and distrust had on their own lives. They were also asked about narratives in the community that had an influence on cultural hegemony and race discourses. In sharing these narratives, participants could identify the private stories and the cultural knowledges that fed distrust and misunderstanding. On the other hand, by looking at alternative narratives of trust and friendship in the community, the co-researchers were encouraged to orient themselves to aspects of their experience that contradicted destructive knowledges (White 1992:127). When the participants were able to deconstruct the dominant discourse of an estranged relationship, they were free to explore alternative and preferred ways of being and thinking, and of whom they might be (White 1992:126).

Externalising conversations did not take away responsibility. In fact, this way of talking about the problem story enabled participants to assume responsibility, because they became aware of, and were able to describe their relationship with the problem. In this research, externalising language was an attitude, and not a mere method. This prevented the conversations from being forced and shallow (Freedman & Combs 1996:47).

Narrative research does not end with a conclusion, but with new possibilities which can further be explored (Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001:4).

1.5.3 Interpretations of experiences are made with co-researchers

Positivist research makes use of an existing academic theory guiding the design for data collecting. The data is then used to test and modify the original theory (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 56). Qualitative researchers build meaning from

the examples and experiences named by co-researchers (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 302).

During the conversations with members of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad, there were recurring themes and experiences that had to be explained in later interviews (Rubin & Rubin 1995:7, 56; Polkinghorne 2007:11). I allowed time for the co-researchers to explore reflectively and then I had more conversations in order for them to elaborate on these meanings (Polkinghorne 2007: 11). I also sent participants transcripts of the conversations to read. This enabled them to reflect, and to clarify or change that which was said. In order to arrive at meanings that the researcher and co-researcher, and also the co-researchers reciprocally, could understand, I created space for “repeated reformulations of questions and responses” (Mishler 1986: 65).

This process is known as *grounded theory* (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 4). Grounded theory in this research materialised in the co-researchers clarifying and explaining their experiences. They were encouraged to elaborate, and discuss experiences at length, in order to get to a thick description. A thick description was grounded in the co-researcher’s first-hand experience. The researcher and co-researchers decided what issues to explore; what remained to be said, and worked to provide the thick description that built towards an overall picture (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 11). The thick descriptions depicted the meaning and interpretation of stories told (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 8).

In order to broaden the focus and to enrich the interpretations (Müller, 2003: 302), more people were invited to help clarify certain discussions. Existing literary sources and evidence on the topics discussed were utilised, and

transcripts of the group discussion were sent to a language and history scholar for enrichment by interdisciplinary dialogue.

1.6 Validity and ethical considerations

In this study, the experiences narrated by the co-researchers rendered explanation, gave meaning and offered insight behind the relationship between church members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad (Oliver: 1998:252). It described the local context, and the recent history of the two churches. The social-cultural characteristics of the co-researchers such as their values, beliefs, race, social class, ethnicity and gender provided special meaning to their narratives. It also indicated the larger social context from which the participants' narratives emerged (Oliver: 1998:252).

Within this multi-layered setting, my task as researcher was to configure the different narratives so that the meanings and interpretations that were constructed could emerge (Oliver 1998:254). The research text grew out of the repeated asking of questions about the meaning of participants' narratives. I looked for the "patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes" (Clandinin & Connelly 2000:132) within the co-researchers' experiences and in the social, historical context.

For a valid description, there were a number of concerns I continuously kept in mind. One such concern was to display myself as honest and authentic within the text (Oliver 1998:254). Claiming objectivity would be untruthful. Instead, I stated my interest in the research, and I explained my positioning in a postmodern worldview and theology. Another concern was how I presented the participants' narratives and interpretations: I kept in mind that their

narratives were only partial representations – that which is told, is not all there is - and interpretations are temporary in that it continuously change and evolve.

The claims of this narrative research are about the meaning that certain experiences hold for the co-researchers, and about their understanding of situations, others and themselves (Polkinghorne 2007:6). The researcher can only portray what is exposed, and needs to guard against truth claims and generalisations. It is also important to note that storied texts portray personal meaning, and not a factual occurrence of events (Polkinghorne 2007:9). However, the meanings of the respective narratives are responses to life events (Polkinghorne 2007:9) and the knowledge claims are not relative fiction: it contributes to an understanding of the human condition. In order for this contribution to be considered by the readers, care should be taken by the researcher to present an honest account (Polkinghorne 2007:6).

Polkinghorne (2007:6; 10; 11; 12) identifies a number of threats to the validity of storied description, which I regarded throughout the research conversations and the interpretations thereof: experience itself is more complex than can be articulated in language, and meanings about a situation are always greater than what can be said about them. In the research discussions, I listened attentively. Reading the transcripts of the conversations afterwards helped me to remember and identify issues that were not explored during the conversation. I would then contact the participant and enquire about the issues. That gave them time to think it through, so that with my next visit to Ohrigstad, we could revisit it. In the group conversation, I allowed times for the participants to reflect on their own about what was said, which initiated an exploration of the intricate multiplicities of an experienced meaning.

People are often uncomfortable with revealing their feelings and understandings to others, especially to strangers. This was true of Rev Siphon of URCSA. In our first conversation when he was unsure about me, he was guarded. In later interviews, he was more open to responses. Time between our interviews helped him to reflect on what we had discussed, which also deepened his subsequent responses. Rev Siphon and Rev Anton, the previous minister of the DRC, have a trusting friendship. Following a discussion about this research between the two friends, Siphon's trust towards me grew, which made him more open with his responses. After the research conversations, Siphon and I have met again over lunch - we discussed the interpretations of the research conversations again, and also the progress the relationship between the two churches has made recently.

Critique on narrative research is that the texts generated by interviews are not simply productions of participants - they are creations of an interaction between researchers and participants. With every research conversation, I had a natural curiosity, and my approach, which I also communicated to the co-researchers, was that of a learner. I wanted to learn from the participants, and their local knowledge was valuable.

Acknowledging that the participants were the only ones with access to their experienced meaning empowered them to boldly share their experiences. By assuming an open listening stance and carefully attending to their narratives, I ensured that the participant's own voices were heard. I gave my descriptions to the participants to alter, take away, or add interpretations. Sue Webb (2006: 228) states that in a relationship of researcher and co-researchers, the research has to make sense to the participants, and everyone needs transparent information through all the stages of the process.

The narrative approach of being in a not knowing position, and accepting the co-researchers as the experts, was helpful to counter power relationships. It was also valuable in the intercultural research conversations where I was aware of my own cultural affiliations, but open to learn from other cultural expectations (Webb 2006:25).

The above also addresses ethical concerns of openness and accountability. Although the research participants gave formal consent⁴ to participating in the research conversations, they could not anticipate how sharing their narratives would affect them. That was why I continuously - while listening to the narratives, after the conversations, and during writing - asked the participants about their experience of the research (Webb 2006: 236). I was mindful that the co-researchers were the first readers of the research text (Clandinin & Connelly 2000: 173). All participants indicated that they wanted me to use their real names, and stated that in such a small town, people in any case knew what everyone's view was on the relationship between URCSA and the DRC. To make sure, I included their names in the written texts I sent them, so that they could decide if they were comfortable with it.

Throughout the research, I was wakeful regarding the ethical considerations. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2002:182), wakefulness is a constant alert awareness of risks, narcissism, simplistic plots and unidimensional characters.

⁴ See addendum 1 for an example of informed consent.

1.7 Research procedures

The narrative research conversations were conducted with members of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrighstad, who are key role players in the two congregations. The aim of the conversations was to listen to stories of understanding and misunderstanding, to explore ubuntu language, and to give each participant an opportunity to voice his/her experience.

To start with the research, I contacted the current ministers of the two churches, asking for their consent⁵. I also asked them to identify church members who could participate. I then contacted the representatives of the DRC and URCSA who attended the weekend workshop in 2006. They brought participants who were not present at the workshop, into the research conversations. This method of finding co-researchers is called snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is when the researcher asks participants to identify other people who are also key role players in the field of the research. Sometimes a name also came up in the various research conversations, which I followed up on (Cohen & Crabtree: 2006).

I discussed the research objectives, and gave a letter with a statement of consent to each person, inviting him/her to be a co-researcher (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 106). In the statement, I described the research, and my own background as researcher (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 95). I explained the participant's role as co-researcher - a person who is not the "object" of the research, but a co-creator. I asked permission to audio-record the interviews, and whether they preferred their real names to be used, or pseudonyms. I assured the co-researchers that they would be able to make

⁵ See addendum 2 for an example of the written consent

corrections and additions on the transcripts of the conversations (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 102).

In most cases, the individual research conversations took place at the participants' homes. Others were held at the URCSA building in Rietfontein, one of the villages. The conversations occurred between June 2014 and April 2016. The participants were informed about the research beforehand, but I did not want to force an agenda on the conversations. I asked questions such as: "How long have you been staying in Ohrigstad"? "Are you happy here"? "Can you think of stories about trust"? "Can you think of stories about distrust"? "Which experiences feed these stories"? As the co-researchers shared their narratives, we explored the meaning of their experiences.

The individual conversations flowed into a group conversation between the participants of the DRC and Ohrigstad in October 2015. The venue for the joint research conversation was at a farm of two co-researchers. They were well liked and trusted. The other participants knew the farm and always felt welcome there. We sat under a tree in a circle, which provided a space in which all participants were equally important.

I implemented Mamphela Ramphele's *Letsema Circle Healing Approach*, which is a collective action forum designed to talk about problems (Ramphele 2013:132). Consistent with Ramphele's approach, the group conversation started with participants introducing themselves by their names, surnames and narratives about their parents. This deepened the connection between participants and set the tone for narrative enquiry. The co-researchers and I listened attentively, and explored each narrative further. When this conversation quietened down, I asked the group: "What are your dreams for Ohrigstad"? The participants first had time to contemplate, and then they

shared their dreams, after which we explored each dream further. Another question was: “What are the stories in the church that stand in the way of your dreams”? More questions were: “Can you think of things that make your dreams strong”? “Can you think of ideas that you can bring into this circle that can make your dream even stronger”? The participants and I listened to, and repeatedly explored, the narratives recounted. The conversation ended with a shared meal.

I sent to the co-researchers the transcript and interpretations of the group narratives, inviting them to comment. A few months later I followed up by contacting the ministers of the two churches and inquired about the aftermath of the research conversations.

1.8 Chapter outline

Chapter 2 A postmodern epistemology in the context of South Africa

A postmodern worldview revises our claims on truth and knowledge. Language constitutes our lives, which is significant for thinking about discourses such as culture, religion, race and poverty in South Africa.

Chapter 3 The contextual and prophetic consequences of a postmodern practical theology

The implications of a postmodern practical theology for this research and for the church, is that it brings forth a spirituality of wholeness as an alternative to exclusion and compartmentalisation. It shows that the context, with human

participation and human narratives, are more important than external, universal truths. A prophetic interpretation of religion is advocated for the church in South Africa, and the possibilities of intercultural and interdisciplinary practice is explored.

Chapter 4 Ubuntu language

In this chapter, I explore the following: the term ubuntu; ubuntu language as discourse; ubuntu language interpreted as past, present and future; and the possibilities of ubuntu language for this research and for the church in South Africa.

Chapter 5 The Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in the context of apartheid South Africa

The broad historical context of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad is closely linked to the apartheid narrative in South Africa. I look into the history of distrust; the role that the DRC played to maintain the narrative; voices of protest; turning points and challenges of a new era.

Chapter 6 Conversations with members of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa in Ohrigstad - narratives of trust and distrust

Individual narrative research conversations with church members in Ohrigstad depicted a historical relationship, recent estrangement, accounts of destructive discourses, and possibilities of ubuntu language.

Chapter 7 Ubuntu language - helping us move forward

A group discussion between co-researchers of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad portrayed the resilience of ubuntu language and the possibilities for bridging gaps. The participants shared their narratives and interpretations with each other, which initiated a process of deconstructing problem stories such as language, race and otherness, and poverty.

Chapter 8 Reflections

The final chapter summarises the description with reflections of the co-researchers and myself, as well as of a scholar from the discipline of language and history. The contribution of this study and possibilities for further study are described.

Chapter 2

A Postmodern epistemology in the context of South Africa

In Chapter Two, I ask the question: what difference can a postmodern worldview make in the context of the research, where exclusion and distrust obstruct authentic relationships?

As a white female who has been a minister in the DRC for 19 years, I became aware of an environment in which, for example, black, female and gay voices, have not always been taken seriously. Certain knowledge of what was right, wrong, important and unimportant were elevated above other, marginalised knowledge. This account of hegemony in the church is still obstructing authentic relationships, especially between many black members of URCSA and white members of the DRC.

Being part of the minority of female ministers in a white, male dominated DRC, I started to utilise a strong epistemic and theological positioning, which influences how I conduct my everyday life, and how I perceive the world around me. It is a postmodern approach, which a number of theologians in the DRC are currently practicing. For me, this positioning is a way of life, more than an abstract theory, and I conduct my research accordingly. I find it important to state my position clearly, because it not only forms the basis of my methodology, but it also reveals many of the reasons that made exclusion in the South African society, as well as in the church possible.

In this chapter, I subsequently explore a postmodern epistemology that revises our view on truth and knowledge, how language discourses constitute our lives, and, finally, its consequences for thinking about culture, religion, race and poverty in South Africa.

2.1 A Postmodern approach: revising objective truth, knowledge and reason

Much of the history of exclusion in South Africa and the DRC stems from a modernist view that human differences, morality and reason can be classified according to independent and superior knowledge and truths (Comaroff 2001: 267). In the twentieth century, this worldview was utilised to support political agendas (Haarhoff 2011:1), and it served as the philosophical legitimisation for European countries to colonise other parts of the world, especially African countries. The philosophical and scientific discourses of modernism marginalised African cultures and subjugated it to European culture (Comaroff 2001: 269; Van der Merwe 2015:3, 4). In South Africa and in the DRC, decisions were made in line with the above.

Race inequality in South Africa had its foundation in the colonialism⁶ of the past, but in the 1950's, when apartheid as political programme was adopted by the National Party government, race segregation was institutionalised. The modernist approach from Europe led to the vision of a society that could be structured according to precise categories. Technical solutions were used to solve social issues, for example separate living areas for different race groups (Haarhoff 2011:1). This social engineering programme of segregation isolated communities and caused distrust, prejudice and enmity (Cloete 2012:121; Van der Merwe: 2015:9).

⁶ According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Kohn 2014), colonialism is a practice of dominion, which involves the subjugation of one people over another. It is not restricted to a time or place, however, the modern European colonial project commenced in the sixteenth century when European countries settled, and took political control over the rest of the world, including the Americas, Australia, parts of Africa and Asia. In the context of this study, the repercussions of European colonialism are still visible in racial relations and in social and economic concerns.

In South Africa, the church and society's view of humanity was congruent with a modernist emphasis on reason, which made social prejudice possible. A modernist philosophy claims that the unique status of human beings in the world is a consequence of reason - the possession of reason affirms that a person is morally and ontologically human. The problem is that those in power positions can decide which group of people is in possession of "true" reason. In this regard, Michael Cloete⁷ (2012:117) argues:

...It therefore follows that to doubt the presence of reason in any *other*, is tantamount to doubting their humanness as a person, hence the less than human status that has historically been associated with the various victims of racial, social and gender inequality and oppression across the world.

Modernism, based on Rene Descartes's notion that reason constitutes a person (*cogito ergo sum*), put reason's meaning and morality in authority over traditional resources like culture, specific codes, beliefs and collective history (Van der Merwe 2015: 6). It leads to racial, social and gender oppression. When a modernist paradigm is confronted with different cultures, the "other" culture is not perceived as equal, because of its unscientific nature, language and beliefs. In a colonial setup, the primitive language of indigenous people is only seen as a means to communicate the coloniser's requirements. The coloniser's language sets the standard of civilisation for the colonised. Modernism provided the basis for the idea that the non-Western world, specifically the people of Africa, had nothing of great value to offer (Cloete 2012:120).

As the natural sciences evolved, and with the possibility of studying matter on subatomic level, gaps became visible in modernist thinking. A philosophical

⁷ Michael Cloete is professor in the department of Philosophy and Systematic Theology, University of South Africa.

paradigm shift, firstly inspired by Nietzsche, started to question the idea of “universal truth” (Cloete 2012:118). This led to a postmodern approach that deals with truth, knowledge and reason differently. Where a modernist approach observes the world as consisting of static building blocks, postmodern thinkers prefer to talk about processes rather than substance and the role of the researcher as discovering and constructing reality at the same time (Heroldt 1998:223). William Schweiker (2000:136) says that in a postmodern approach, “we must grasp how forms of experience are not the empty categories of reason, but, rather, complex linguistic media that work to shape perceptions for good or ill.”

A postmodern approach does not reject modern assumptions of scientific knowledge, expertise or progress; it only attempts to revise the modernist view of truth and knowledge (Papps & Olssen 1997:37). It only rejects truth in particular as an “exclusive notion” (Du Toit 1997:942). Truth as such is not rejected, but the boundaries of truth claims as well as the conditions under which they operate are recognised.

The conception of objective knowledge (which is a prominent aspect of the modernist approach) is also questioned (Dill & Kotze 1997:15). A postmodern approach offers what Ricoeur calls a pragmatic historiography, which “tries not to separate representations from the practices by which social agents set up the social bond and include multiple identities within it” (Ricoeur 2004:229). Our beliefs about the world are social inventions - it is not a reflection or map of the world, but an artefact of communal interchange (Gergen 1985:266; Hoffman 1990:2).

Instead of modernist exclusionism and categorisation, a postmodern approach invites us to enter into dialogue with undisclosed traditions and wisdom of other cultures (Van der Merwe: 1015:8). It values human participation - especially from those who are marginalised - as essential to knowledge of an external world. Maturana & Varela (1992:245) state:

The knowledge of knowledge compels. It compels us to adopt an attitude of permanent vigilance against the temptation of certainty. It compels us to recognise that certainty is not a proof of truth. It compels us to realise that the world everyone sees is not the world but a world, which we bring forth with others. It compels us to see that the world will be different only if we live differently.

A postmodern approach manifests in different ways. In the following paragraphs, I describe its understanding of discourse, power relations and the deconstruction thereof, as well as knowledge as a social construct. Lastly, I explore a postmodern view on culture and religious domination, race and poverty in the South African context.

2.2 Discourse

In the church in South Africa, a postmodern approach assists us in recognising and deconstructing destructive discourses that marginalise and exclude people.

The term “discourse” is a prominent concept in postmodern thought. According to postmodern thought, discourse - as a public process of conversation - constitutes meaning. It follows that beliefs, laws, social customs, habits of dress and diet - all the things that make up our “reality” - are mere social discourses, which arise through social interaction over time (Freedman & Combs 1996:23). In this way, social discourse helps societies maintain and disseminate hard-won “knowledge”. At the same time, these social discourses can also blind us to other possibilities or subjugated knowledges (Freedman & Combs 1996:24).

The recognition of discourses contrasts the modernist belief that language presents a reliable and accurate link between the objective and subjective worlds. According to this belief system, there is a real world “out there”, and we can know it through language (Freedman & Combs 1996:28). Language is used to represent external reality, and is seen as a tool with which we can describe objective knowledge that is outside of us. Thus, discourses that people create about the world and each other become fixed.

Within a postmodern approach, dominant discourses can be identified and deconstructed, because language is not a mere tool to describe objects - but rather it is seen as *constituting* our world and beliefs. Societies construct their views of reality within language. “The only worlds that people can know are the worlds we share in language” (Freedman & Combs 1996:28). Anderson & Goolishian (1992:26) argues that people live, and understand their living, through socially constructed narrative realities that give meaning and organization to their experience.

A dominant discourse in society can have a constituting effect on an individual's personal life story, because people tend to internalise the dominant discourses of our culture, believing that they speak the truth of our identities (White 1992:33-52). According to Müller (2004:302), these traditions of interpretation in different groups of society inform meaning and behaviour. By listening carefully to people, and by listening to the literature of certain contexts, these discourses can be identified, making change and a better understanding possible.

2.3 A Poststructural view on discourse

In the following paragraphs, I describe the poststructural approach, by which Foucault shows how power discourses operate in a society, followed by

Derrida's insights on how we deconstruct these discourses. I explore this within in the context of this research.

2.3.1 Discourse and power in South Africa

In this research, I came across a number of power discourses that are commonplace in South African society today.

Within the apartheid system, white people of South Africa were those who maintained powerful positions. The previous government claimed that it was in possession of the "truth." Apartheid did not depend only on a modernist worldview; it claimed science and religion as witnesses to its truth (Du Toit 1997:951).

Martin Prozesky (1990:129) states that apartheid shows just how easily even devout believers in a heavily Christianised culture can unwittingly make their faith into an effective component of group self-interest, in the forms of nationalist domination and economic exploitation. After the first democratic election in 1994, we saw the unravelling of the Afrikaner-Christian discourse *inter alia* through the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We saw the deconstruction of the power discourse in public domain, by hearing many religious narratives, voices and stories (Paul 2009:12). However, the repercussions of this discourse are still playing out. On the other hand, another power discourse of politics had emerged in South Africa. After 1994, a political elite arrived, which introduced new power relations. This new dominant social discourse has a far-reaching effect on people's lives. Sam, a participant in this research, tells of his experience:

I have a Masters in educational management. I am a history teacher at a secondary school in the area. I do not feel motivated. The public system is not motivating. Politics has played a major part. The system has been politicised. It is difficult to get a promotion, because you are

not a “comrade” - interviews are only a formality. It makes me feel disempowered. I feel completely demotivated. There are no alternatives. If there were alternatives, I would go and do something else. The community is suffering because of that. The leadership at my school causes the school to degenerate. When you propose measures to improve, they do not listen - they feel you are belittling them and challenging their leadership.

Another example of such an emerging political power discourse, where people in new political power positions do more harm than good, comes from one of the research participants, Jan, a farmer in Ohrigstad:

Here (in Ohrigstad) are many land claims. I am chair of the landowner society. It is a huge point of conflict. The people (black people from the townships) are told if you can prove that your ancestors stayed here, you get land. So many land claims have been pushed through, which have nothing to do with lawful land claims. The law states that only people who were unfairly moved, receive land, but 99% of the time the land claims are about other things. People disagree among each other about who owned the land first...

Now government comes with a bus - they take old, poor people with them. I am also on the bus. The old people think they are going to receive land. We visit the specific farm - Kleinfontein. The landowner is shocked - there is huge conflict between him and the people who want to take his land. Now government officials tell this bus full of poor 70 to 80 year-olds that this will be their land. As we drive through, the old people say: “Look at all this meat (the game on the farm), and all this fire wood (the trees). While we are driving, I tell the government officials: “You are giving these people false hope - they do not really have a claim.” Kleinfontein does not have enough water for people and

animals. Millions of rands have been spent to make this a game farm.
But I say you cannot be angry with these old people.

Foucault (1980:109-133) explains how such power discourses - in which some have power, and others have none - operate in societies. His work was based on the ways in which society categorised and thus marginalised certain sectors of society resulting in labels such as “normal” and “abnormal.” According to Foucault, language is a powerful tool used by those in power to shape society's attitudes by determining the preferred discourses in society while other discourses are subjugated.

Foucault speaks of the *government of truth*, which refers to the power over human conduct, which Western societies have extended to those authorised to speak from a position of knowledge and in the name of “truth.” Today we experience this power as the truth of norms - the expert's truth about what is normal or abnormal, safe or dangerous.

A discourse of *disciplinary expertise* contributes to the government of conduct, yet this discourse has not been legitimised by contract, conquest or divine right. Such power is not vested in any individual. According to Foucault, power has to be studied as something that circulates, or as something which functions in the form of a chain. It cannot be localised, it is never in anybody's hands, and is never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. It is exercised through a net-like organisation. Those who maintain power positions control knowledge, and those who hold knowledge are placed in a powerful position (Foucault 1980:109-133).

To Foucault, knowledge is thus linked to power (Lechte 1994:114). He says about the relation between power and knowledge: “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (quoted in Papps & Olssen 1997:28). Discourse relates and helps organise social relations as

power relations. It also organises and excludes forms of knowledge. “Power is usually thought of as the exercise of the will of one social act over others” (Parker 1989:61).

Foucault's view of power relations opens up an opportunity to rework instances of social interaction in the politically judged patterns of racism and other forms of domination at work in society (Parker 1989:67). When people become aware of unethical power discourses, they are more able to challenge the dominant stories that constitute their lives - and that helps them to change their roles.

2.3.2 Deconstruction of power and knowledge

In the South African context, Western culture has been the superior and efficient culture for a very long time. If we apply Derrida's views on deconstruction to our context, we discover the value of many other cultures and knowledges that were obscured by Western discourses.

Scepticism about dominant discourses in life brings about an exploration of the gaps, silences, ambiguities and power relations implicit in these discourses. Jacques Derrida endeavoured to deconstruct Western metaphysics. Deconstruction, according to Derrida, does not take things apart, it is not an operation; it only reveals how things are put together (Wolfreys 1998:14). Derrida wanted to deconstruct a tradition that has dominated Western thought since the birth of early Greek philosophy.

Derrida had a methodological “device” to accomplish this feat (Sampson 1989:7). This device hinges on the notion of placing a term under erasure. “To place something under erasure is, literally, first to write a word and then to cross it out, and then to print both the word and its deletion” (Sampson 1989:7). For Derrida this strategic task is necessary for the task of employing the familiar in order to deconstruct the commonly known. The presence of one

concept contains in it elements of the absent one. In this, we see that every form of revealment implies some degree of concealment. If we reveal one thing, we conceal another. By considering one perspective, for example the superior knowledge of a certain group, we neglect other similar perspectives. The tension between what is said and what is not said is *difference* (Lechte, 1994:107; Wolfreys 1998:7).

Derrida's aim is not to overthrow the Western tradition merely to install an alternative tradition in its place. His deconstructive aim is primarily to question widely held notions (Sampson 1989:8). Deconstruction opens the way for us to see hidden cultures and ways of being in a new perspective. It also makes new meanings possible.

In this research, the process of deconstruction facilitated the co-researchers to look past problem narratives of race and otherness, to find alternative possibilities.

The social construction discourse (2.4) that flows from a postmodern approach, deconstructs the modernist notion of autonomous individualism, and derives meaning from community instead of individual control.

2.4 Social construction discourse

In the research conversations, social construction discourse was helpful in analysing the way members of both the DRC and URCSA viewed themselves and each other, because it enabled the participants to consider the origins of taken-for-granted assumptions. Kenneth Gergen (1985:266) states that the social construction discourse is concerned with “explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live.” The objective basis of conventional knowledge is challenged.

Social construction does not offer itself as the final word on knowledge – it is a *discourse*, which offers a helpful insight on the nature of truth and knowledge. It questions the theory of language as “a transparent medium, capable of accurately reflecting an independent reality *out there*” (Cloete 2012:117). It emphasises the importance of language as social phenomenon through which humans as relational beings live.

Within a social construction discourse, we keep in mind that people exist in language. According to Anderson and Goolishian (1992:27), communication and discourse define social organisation. “A socio-cultural system is the product of social communication” (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:27). Meaning and understanding are socially constructed. Freedman and Combs (1996:16) argue that the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws and divisions of labour that make up our social realities, are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another through generations, and from day to day.

Piet Naudé (2011:501) uses the example of name-calling to describe how language can constitute and shape reality in a negative way. He says inhumanity starts by name-calling:

Name-calling categorises people in a derogatory manner. It creates the sharp boundary between “we” and “them”: “we”, the conquerors, and “they” the lesser, indigenous ones; we the Europeans and they the Africans; we the whites and they the blacks; we the mighty South Africans and they the lowly and unwelcome *makerekere*⁸. Derogatory language serves the crucial strategy of making sure that the “other” is seen as “less than human”. It is difficult at first to socially isolate or

⁸ Makerekere is a name given to foreign nationals, who are perceived not to have real languages – when they speak they make only kwere-kwere-kwere sounds (Maluleke 2015:17)

physically remove or attack other human beings that are equal to or just like oneself. That is when language moves to words calling other people cockroaches, or dogs or hyenas. It is easier to kill animals or crush cockroaches beneath our feet than actual human beings...The histories of many postcolonial countries tell the same sad story.

An important implication of a social construction discourse is that it “directs our attention to the social, moral, political, and economic institutions that sustain and are supported by current assumptions about human activity” (Gergen 1985:268). When I look at what Gergen says about social construction discourse, I can see that what was traditionally believed to be “hard facts”, actually depended on an array of social micro processes. In a social construction approach, there is an epistemological shift from an experiential to a social epistemology. Gergen notes that the explanatory locus of human action shifts from an interior region to the processes of human interaction (Gergen 1985:271). A Person’s identity is a “continuous reweaving of various patterns of the cultures one is exposed to” (Van Der Merwe 2015:8).

Social construction discourse does not offer foundational rules of warrant, but that does not mean “anything goes.” In fact, the social construction discourse can be of use when it comes to questioning unethical ways of being. Ethical accountability becomes an alternative to empirical evidence (Venter 2012:65). Thus the social construction discourse invites us to view unethical discourses like racism as culturally constituted, and therefore these discourses can be deconstructed more effectively (Gergen 1985:273).

Congruent to the social construction discourse, is the African concept of *Ubuntu* (see Chapter Four) that describes personhood as “ensembled individualism, which includes more fluid boundaries between self and other... and conceives of a self which includes relationships with others” (Du Toit 2005:852). An ubuntu discourse understands the identity of a person as embedded in the life story of the history of the people (Du Toit 2004:546).

2.5 Cultural domination, race and poverty as social constructions

In the history of South Africa, cultural domination, race and poverty became destructive discourses, which were socially constructed through time:

2.5.1 Cultural domination

In South Africa, cultural domination was characterised by a glorification of Western civilisation, and repugnance for black culture and customs (Mbiti 1989:6-10; Balia 1993:209). Western modernity, with its emphasis on Western civilisation and reason, disregarded the significance of African cultures and religions because of its “unscientific nature”. The coloniser’s language became the standard requirement for the colonised to be regarded as civil and Christian (Cloete 2012:121).

In the relationship between the DRC and URCSA today, *language* is often an instrument in marginalising people. In the research conversations, Reverend Siphon from URCSA in Ohrigstad, said the following:

I know people who are proudly Afrikaners. Language is very sensitive. I know a little bit Afrikaans. For the sake of peace, I communicate in Afrikaans. We cannot change it overnight. I was exposed to such a thing. In Pretoria, we had a big church meeting. People of URCSA and the DRC attended the meeting. The people of the DRC communicated in Afrikaans. One of the URCSA members stood up and expressed himself in Tswana. Then one of the DRC members said he needed an interpreter, because this is not in Afrikaans... Afrikaans has a history, also on our side - think about the uprisings when schoolchildren protested against being taught in Afrikaans at school. In our community, our children go to multiracial schools. In the school, they do not learn African languages. At school, they speak English, and at

home, they speak African languages. We can do that to compromise, and still keep your own language alive. Racism is becoming an embarrassment, so people instead stand on their language.

In the DRC, the belief in the superiority of a Christian-Afrikaner discourse was socially constructed through biblical and cultural narratives, for example narratives of the Great Trek and the battle at Blood River (Paul 2012:35). Cloete (2012:121) argues that the ideology of apartheid as a manifestation of European cultural domination, was also based on “a denial of the humanity of the African person.” Christian-Afrikanerdom was ideologically sustained and supported by influential religious and academic leaders (Paul 2012:35).

Cultural domination is a social construct that annihilates a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves (Nolan 1988:51; Wa Thiong'o 1986:3). Cultural domination makes people see their past as a wasteland of non-achievement, and that brings about the suffering of humiliation (Nolan 1988:51,52; Ward & Worden 1998:201-217).

Thias Kgatla (1994:202), former moderator of URCSA (Northern Synod) uses very strong, emotional words when he writes about cultural and religious domination. He states that missionaries were exhorted to fight against and eradicate “all the vestiges of the devil” from black cultures. According to Kgatla (1994:203), colonial conquering of black people was regarded as God's action and necessary for the advancement of the mission enterprise, and many missionaries and colonialists repudiated black religious practices. The language that constructed the position of black people implied their non-personhood - words like non-European, non-White, non-Christian and non-Western (Kgatla 1994:203). Black people could not resemble “white Christians” unless they had been westernised in a special way. It was the task of missionaries to bring Africans into conformity with white people.

Balia (1993:210) describes how Christian missionaries saw African people, when he quotes excerpts from letters written by early missionaries:

The natives of South Africa have migrated from the North, differing widely from each other in physique, in speech, in occupation, in tribal custom and in religion, and having among them Bushmen who in the scale of civilisation ranked lowest - he was a roving huntsman, nothing more.

These stereotypes by the powerful became the cornerstone of oppression because the weaker and the poor were regarded as targets to be conquered. All these, together with the concomitant seizure of their land by force, left the whole fabric of African community life destroyed. The logical consequence for many Africans was to accept the negative description of themselves by white people. Because they had lost everything, they could no longer be a proud nation - the dominated group defined themselves by the knowledge and power of the domineering group. White culture and values were raised to the level of universality and authenticity. In order to achieve high grades, the dominated followed the dominating value system, and mostly used the resources of the powerful (Kgatla 1994:203; Balia 1993:209-217).

The history of colonisation, apartheid and Christian Afrikanerdom in South Africa, demonstrates the demoralising effect that cultural and religious domination as a social construction can have. Members of URCSA and the DRC are still struggling with this reality today.

2.5.2 Race as a social construct

In the research discussions, one of the URCSA members, Rev Sipho, talked about his experience of race:

Racism is rife in Ohrigstad. Once I was invited by one of the farmers to his house - we know each other. We were sitting in the kitchen drinking tea. The farmer's son came in and asked: "Pappa, hoekom drink jy tee met 'n swart man? (Dad, why are you drinking tea with a black man?)" I tried to pretend I did not hear, but the farmer saw I heard. He apologised. He said "sorry, it's just a child." I laughed it off, but after that, I was very disturbed. I felt embarrassed and disappointed. It is strange, because the primary school has black and white children. It is very sad. Again, on a farm, I went with people from the DRC Lux Mundi congregation. They were here on an outreach. I was the only black person. When we entered the place, all of a sudden the farmer's dog confronted only me. The owner apologised. Was the dog trained? But it is not the majority... I think racism is something very strange. It is something evil, not human. It is the opposite of ubuntu. You cannot explain ubuntu - you can write about ubuntu, but you will always leave something out. This is the same with racism.

Interestingly, Nelson Mandela recalls a similar experience in his book, *A long walk to freedom* (1994:76):

That first morning at the firm, a pleasant young, white secretary took me aside and said: Nelson, we have no colour bar here at the law firm... In honour of your arrival, we have purchased two new cups for you and Gaur... I will call you when the tea comes and then you can take your tea in the new cups". I was grateful for her ministrations, but I knew that the two new cups she was so careful to mention were evidence of the colour bar she said did not exist. The secretaries might share tea with two Africans, but not the cups with which to drink it.

Race is a social construct, rooted in a system in which not being Western is relegated to all that is less valued by the dominant culture. This is accomplished by the cultural hegemony that Western thought has had in our

society. To be white meant that one was more intelligent, more developed, and wealthy (Frankenberg 1993:233).

The social construction discourse deconstructs “whiteness” as a cultural construct, and the privileging of certain knowledges are questioned. When deconstructing the discourse of being white, there are many subjugated knowledges about race that are exposed. It is then discovered that white people are “raced”, just as men are “gendered” (Frankenberg 1993:1). According to Frankenberg, “whiteness” is only a “standpoint”, a place from which white people look at themselves, at others and at society. She describes how white people are caught up in a dominant power discourse, where people of colour are believed to be fundamentally “other” than white people (Frankenberg 1993:61). Within this discourse, people of colour are seen as different, inferior, less civilised and less human than whites, whereas white people are seen as examples of normality.

Because racism and whiteness are dominant power discourses culturally constructed over a very long period, many people of colour have bought into the idea that everything Western is better - even where small everyday details such as physical appearance is concerned.

bell hooks, in her book *Sisters of the Yam* (1993), describes how long, straight hair has been made the norm of what is beautiful, and how black women inadvertently bought into this extreme example of cultural hegemony:

As grown-ups, many of us look back at childhood years of having our hair combed and braided by other black women as a moment of tenderness and care that was peace giving and relaxing. In a workshop with black women, where one of the women present was trying to decide whether to process her hair, I began to talk about the different feel of natural hair, raising the question of whether processed hair is inviting to the touch. As with other such group discussions, black

women there began to insist that they did not like anybody touching
their hair. hooks 1993:86

Exploring the issue further, trying to discover the origins of this dislike, hooks found that it was rooted in the fear that black women's hair was not an aspect of their being that most of them considered as related to bodily pleasure. hooks says that many black women regard their hair as a problem. She argues that despite the raised consciousness of black people concerning the question of internalised racism, most black magazines still favour images of black women with long, straight hair.

This is but one example of a cultural discourse that constitutes people's everyday lives. Racism as cultural discourse is centralised when people are marginalised through the undervaluing of their culture, their art, their dances, religions, history, education and their language (Wa Thiong'o 1986:16). As hooks explains, it is also the undervaluing of people's physical appearance, substituting it with a dominant discourse of what success looks like:

Often, in advertisements, the light-skinned woman with straight hair will be depicted as the female who has a partner or who is sexually more appealing.

hooks 1993:87

A consequence of race as a power discourse is that white and black people usually tend to fear each other. They defensively start to avoid each other, rather than to learn from one another (Landman 2013:95). Twenty-two years into democracy, the race discourse is still prevalent in South Africa; also in Ohrigstad, as can be seen in separate living space and separate churches for black and white people.

2.5.3 A discourse of poverty

Enid, a female member of URCSA in Ohrigstad, told the following during the research conversations:

I have been living here (Ohrigstad) my whole life. I am happy, though there are challenges in the community. We have problems with water, the orphans, child headed families, HIV and education. Many kids do not go to school, there is no recreation for them, and they end up on the street. I cannot be happy and say the kids are doing fine. In our culture, all the kids are your children. When they are educated, the community can develop. Because of economic challenges, people do not have food; they do not have enough to help the kids. It is sad; it is as if they were my own children...

In the older days when our parents or grandparents worked at the mines - even if they did not send money - when you come back, your child is grown-up. Others brought up your children. For instance, the people next door will come with a basket of mealie meal. Now it is different. People still care, but they cannot share so much. You can feel for someone with no food. You can just talk, but if you cannot put food on the table, it is not worth it. We cannot plough - we depend on the rain. We do not have water - no running water. We depend on dams and rivers. The water pump is not working; the water in the pipes just stopped. Not all villages have pipes in it. We have a fountain for drinking water. There are boreholes... sometimes we buy. It will be helpful if people can learn to use grey water for mealies. We care; but we do not know how, whom to approach. Everything is money...

I am teaching at a primary school in the village. Last year it was difficult for me - I cried. You share your food with them. There is potential, but because they do not have enough food, they cannot concentrate. There

are 500 learners and they only get a spoon of porridge or soup from the government. They do not drink enough water. There is something wrong with the system. You know what harm apartheid did to us: In the olden days in rural villages, we did not get attention; we would be the last people to be serviced. It is the same with the educational system. It is still like that. Even the changes are not enough.

Poverty as a discourse constitutes a downward spiral that tells people they are less than human, that they deserve nothing better, and they should live their lives accordingly. It becomes a fatalistic, oppressive “truth” that is hard to challenge. The more people are marginalised by poverty, the harder it gets to differentiate themselves from society’s discourses. Poverty leaves people disempowered, because it takes away their power to make decisions (Müller 2009:25).

Much of the least attractive aspects of the present South African (and African) political economy stems directly from cultural and racial domination. In order to live comfortably in a newly found “home away from home”, white colonialists moved quickly to establish hegemonic structures. Black people were reduced to “drawers of water and hewers of wood” (Chitando 1998:76). While the missionaries who accompanied the colonialists sometimes protested against the inhuman treatment of black people, the colonialists were fully convinced that the “native” did not deserve better treatment (Chitando 1998:76; Kgatla 1994:209).

When the Africans exhibited willpower, white interests were jealously guarded. Industry and commerce were made the preserve of the whites, relegating black people into servant roles. Black people could only succeed in peripheral occupations such as building and barber shops (Chitando 1998:77; Kgatla 1994:205). Chitando says that in the case of Zimbabwe, the position of black people in the economy during colonialism had decisive repercussions on their present-day status - and that is also true for South Africa. Black people have

largely been relegated to the class of consumers while the reins of power in industry and commerce were firmly in the hands of a few white males (Chitando 1998:78; De Villiers 1991:20).

By the end of the colonial period, the global domination of the Western free-market economy had been well established in South Africa. African economic and political systems were radically altered, particularly as the need for cheap labour resulted in the disintegration of ritual systems. This was caused by the absence of males for extended periods from their homes as migrant labourers left to work in urban areas (Venter 1998:430).

On the African continent, the after effects of colonialism is visible in the discourse of poverty, and the neoliberal economic globalisation of the postcolonial era is strengthening it. This is evident in the following excerpt from the World Council of Churches' Dar es Salaam Statement on poverty, wealth and ecology:

We have come to the crucial recognition that impoverishment, enrichment and ecological destruction are interlinked. Transatlantic slavery and 500 years of colonialism, had instituted a system of plunder of human and natural resources that enriched colonial powers at the cost of decimating and dehumanising African people. Moreover, the current context of neoliberal economic globalisation, in complicity with patriarchal structures and militarisation, has further undermined African sovereignty, wresting away African people's communal ownership and control over productive means, natural and biotic resources. In concentrating these resources, especially capital, in the hands of powerful nations, international financial institutions and multinational corporations working in collusion with African elites - the agents of empire - the socio-economic disparities between Africa and rich nations

continue to widen at alarming rates. Driven by motives of endless economic expansion and profit maximisation - rather than provisioning for life and care of community and ecology - neoliberal models of wealth creation are threatening the entire web of life

Alternative Globalisation Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE)
Consultation on Linking Poverty, Wealth and Ecology: Africa
Ecumenical Perspectives: 7-9 November 2007.

Poverty, which was socially constructed over many years had, and still has, a devastating effect. Until this day, many black South African voices express the agony thereof. An example is the story of Geli in M Mathabane's book: African Women (1994:133).

When George was born, we were so broke I could not even afford diapers and had to use pieces of rags. Our meals were meagre. We could not afford to buy coal to heat the house in the morning, so my children's teeth chattered in the cold as they went about barefoot and scantily dressed.

The influence of South Africa's history of exclusion left the majority of people disempowered, and the effects will be suffered for a long time to come. Today, South Africa has to contend with an overriding challenge, namely that the social construction of race and apartheid (and colonialism) has left the country with one of the world's widest gaps between rich and poor (Maluleke 1998:327; Nürnberger 1994:124). According to Statistics South Africa, the relationship between population group and poverty levels is significant, with more than half (54,0%) of black Africans living in poverty in 2011 (2014:36).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how a postmodern epistemology revealed modernist, exclusive assumptions of knowledge that resulted in harmful discourses that hinder reconciliation in the South African community as well as in the churches, until this day. Exploring these discourses in the research conversations between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad, empowered the participants to understand their circumstances and to start with a process of deconstruction. The research conversations were conducted within a social constructionist framework - meaning was discovered communally.

In the next chapter, I explore concurrent postmodern practical theological themes in the church and in the context of this research.

Chapter 3

The contextual and prophetic consequences of a postmodern practical theology

In the previous chapter, I explored the way in which a modernist worldview provided truth, knowledge and power for white exclusive control in South Africa. I described a postmodern approach, which views reality as socially constructed through language. This worldview assists us in recognising and deconstructing discourses such as cultural hegemony, race and poverty.

In this chapter, I ask the question: what possibilities does a postmodern practical theology present in discussions about stuck discourses? I describe my viewpoint on practical theological research from a pastoral viewpoint in Ohrigstad; and consider alternative ways of thinking and being for the church in South Africa.

Practicing theology in a postmodern mode is complex. It is difficult to capture its meaning as well as contribution in a single definition. Hence, I will give a broad sketch of some of the implications that a postmodern worldview has for practical theology in South Africa: I start by describing a spirituality of wholeness as an alternative to exclusion and compartmentalisation. I then argue that the context, human narratives and human participation are more important than external truths. I consequently propose a prophetic stance for the church in South Africa. Finally, I explore the possibility of an intercultural and interdisciplinary practice.

3.1 A spirituality of wholeness

In the history of the DRC, a modernist understanding of theology caused its members to live compartmentalised lives - a secular life, as well as a very

personal religious life, which primarily had to do with the redeeming of one's soul for the afterlife. The result was that a person's faith in God did not make much of a difference on his/her everyday life. The compartmentalisation went further than secular and religious life - it made it easy to divide and separate people into black and white, male and female and rich and poor.

Within the scheme of positivism, faith had to be rationally plausible, because theology could only justify its place in the curricula of universities if it adopted the same scientific method as the other academic disciplines. According to David Bosch (1995:17), the pastor became a professional in the same way as physicians, teachers and lawyers. That became problematic, in that modernist thinking knows only a reality that is accessible through sensory perception, and hence it does not include human subjectivity, presuppositions and aspirations as part of reality. This increased fragmentation. Christians had to commute between two different worlds: The church and the secular world, which were in two completely unrelated categories. Religion then, was regarded as set of dogmas that made no difference in society as a whole (Bosch 1995:18). Meaning became lost, because values and transcendent reality do not lend itself to scientific verification. Heroldt (1998:216) claims that such an emotionally sterile and rather clinical framework is obviously not suitable for theological reflection that has to cater for religious needs that include the so-called "fuzzy world" of visions, hopes and beliefs.

Theologians tried to establish a belief system that could meet the standards required by modernist rationality. Rossouw (1993:897) says that: "A leap of faith was still needed to accept the Bible as the Word of God but, once that leap was taken, the challenge of modernist rationality could be handled". The Bible was taken as the basic set of data. A belief system, which was true to this data, was then constructed. The result was a timeless rationalistic and theological exercise, irrelevant for the culture in which it was practiced.

For a long time the church accepted a separation of the world into a realm of “necessity” investigated by science and a realm of “freedom” that is the domain of religion. Christof Schwobel (2000:121) argues that the consequence thereof was the church’s withdrawal from the public debate as a highly specialised institution for private religious needs. This compartmentalised churchgoers’ minds, accepting the findings of the sciences in everyday life, on the one hand, and consenting to the consolations of faith on Sundays, on the other, all the time hoping that the two realms should never meet.

A postmodern practical theology endeavours to heal the fragmentation of reality, caused by systematisation (Heroldt 1998:219). In a postmodern climate, the distinction between religion and secular life becomes blurred (Heroldt 1998:225) and everyday life becomes religious life. Our religion becomes integrated with our whole being and with everything we do. Heroldt (1998:208) states that the ideal is for the “Sunday-world no longer to be foreign to the Monday-world” as it used to be in a fragmented framework.

Another repercussion of positivism was the separation, in an ethical sense, of subject and object. To make an “objective” moral decision, a person is to distance him/herself from his/her personal story and context. This results in an irrelevant ethic of abstract rules. A postmodern ethic brings wholeness in that it breaks through the subject/object scheme, and contemplates responsible humans who make ethical decisions within a community (Koopman & Vosloo 2002:73).

This is important for the contribution of the church in South Africa: if our faith fosters a spirituality of wholeness that provides us with a bigger picture, in which the different dimensions of personal and social life find their place and meaning, we can restore a sense of wholeness wherever we are involved. On the other hand, if our faith consists of compartments and sets of rules - do’s and don’ts - we will not have much to offer (Rossouw 1993:899).

In this research, I attempted to conduct the research conversations with the DRC and URCSA members as participants instead of as research objects. In the conversations, we experienced God to be present in everything that was said - no division was made between faith issues and “worldly” matters.

3.2 Communities of knowledge, contextual practice and human participation

In the individual as well as in the group research conversations, it was clear that religious knowledge and truth were constructed by the community in a specific context - in this case the faith community in Ohrigstad. As the researcher, I depended completely on the co-researchers’ local knowledge, and together we searched for new truths and possibilities. This manner of practicing theology is not only valuable in research - it is mandatory for the church in order to include the marginalised.

3.2.1 Communities of knowledge

Dirkie, a participant in the research, illustrates that religious knowledge is constructed within a community:

It is about relationships - we have to build relationships between us. We must create a space where we can tell each other: “This is how I feel,” so that we can understand each other. We have to try to understand each other; we must walk hand in hand, before it is too late. If we can search for truth together, for God’s will... we must talk about “who is my fellow believer”? We will have to look each other in the eyes and say: “I see you, although I do not understand everything about you.” We must ask: “What is truth and understanding from within the DRC and

URCSA”? There is so much potential. We must come together across the border, instead of each standing alone. I am hopeful - we must just find a breakthrough on how we can talk to one another... It will be so good to know how the URCSA members feel and think about this.

Within the scheme of modernism, theologians were tempted to use the Bible as a textbook, because truth was viewed as a prescribed, static set of propositions that lent itself to be discovered (Heroldt 1998:221).

Theologians believed that we could obtain a sure and exact knowledge of biblical reality. Many white South African theologians claimed to have all the “true” knowledge, for example, that God created different colours, and that the boundaries ordained by God should be respected (Loubser 1987:37). This “knowledge” had the tendency to marginalise people (Pieterse 1996:50-64; Ackermann 1996: 32-49).

Gobbel and Ridenhour (1993:73) argue that the idea of a body of objective truth which we can implant on others, suggests that meaning in the Bible is a “fixed thing, which can be extracted from the Bible if we just pull hard enough, and we persist in the notion that we can tell others what an event, thing or set of words should mean for them.” This manner of reading the Bible was characteristic of Protestant theology, which succumbed to the pressures of the enlightenment.

Over a period, the conviction grew among critical theologians that environment conditioned theology. In a sense, every text is an interpreted text. Reading is not merely a literary process but also a social, economic and political exercise (Pieterse 1995:102). Developments in the natural sciences likewise lean towards a richer account of reality and truth, away from a strictly reductionist physicalism (Polkinghorne & Welker 2000:6).

In a postmodern approach to practical theology, knowledge is not simply set in reason; instead, meaning derives from human and cultural practices (Schweiker 2000:136). Faith communities with its particular beliefs and practices are the result of a communal construction of knowledge, reality, meaning and truth (Gobbel & Ridenhour 1993:81). Pieterse (1996:63) states that a postmodern sensibility has a clear aim of disrupting dominant identities which charade as normality, and universal truths or dogmas are looked at critically.

A postmodern practical theology views understanding as created within communities of knowledge. It shifts the emphasis in spiritual formation from “What do we believe”? to “Who are we”? (Rossouw 1993:901). A practical theologian would then for instance be more interested in the meaning of grace in a specific society than an abstract definition of grace (Heroldt 1998:220). The feminist theologian, Fiorenza (1983:34), suggests that the Bible should be understood in such a way that the route to understanding revelation is not in texts but in Christian experience and community. Viewing religious reality as relative to experience, invokes an awakening to community life in exchange for individual control (Heroldt 1998:218).

In the church in South Africa, especially the DRC and URCSA, a sensitive approach to knowledge is required, in which we hold all constructions of reality, meaning and truth to be tentative and not as completed (Gobbel & Ridenhour 1993:79). For the process of healing, it is important that Western and patriarchal “regimes of truth” and ideologies be deconstructed, so that new meaning can be constructed within a community.

3.2.2 A contextual, practical theology

The context of the participants in this research is Ohrigstad, a typical South African rural town in the province of Mpumalanga. The town with its people has a specific history: According to Hermann Giliomee (2004:132; 133),

Ohrigstad had a dubious start. Between the years 1835 and 1845, a great number of Afrikaans families moved inland from the Cape Colony. They were called *Voortrekkers*, and the movement was called the *Great Trek*. Andries Potgieter, a Great Trek leader, and his faction of Trekkers decided to settle in the Bushveld. There they founded the town Andries Ohrigstad.

Here, many of the Voortrekkers discontinued farming and started hunting elephants for their ivory. The community's leader, Andries Potgieter, became more and more autocratic. His followers started to rebel against him. Moreover, the black tribes in the vicinity increasingly took a hostile stance against Potgieter and his people.

After the death of Andries Potgieter, his son, Piet, took over the leadership. He became interested in poaching cattle from the black tribes. He made agreements with the chiefs of a number of tribes, in order to steal cattle from other tribes. He also forced the tribes in the area to pay tax. Some *Voortrekkers* accused him of being too cruel to the black tribes. In 1846, he planned to attack Mzilikazi in order to find white children who went missing in an attack ten years previously. When they could not find Mzilikazi, they attacked another tribe. They stole 10 000 sheep and took 400 people of the tribe prisoner. Later they also attacked Langa, a friend to the Ohrigstad-Voortrekkers, and his Ndebele tribe. They shot many people and took cattle and children. The children were divided amongst the men, and many of them were sold. Some of Potgieter's men were appalled, and left the commando. One of them warned that Potgieter was putting the country in a crisis, which would take a long time to correct. Not long after that, the community of *Voortrekkers* started to disintegrate. In 1850 it was reported that Ohrigstad was deserted. A number of both black and white co-researchers' family histories go back to the early Ohrigstad experience.

Today, Ohrigstad is a rural town where farming is the dominant industry. I learnt in a conversation with Rev Anton Doyer, the previous minister of the

DRC in Ohrigstad, that farmers constitute the centre of the white community, although there are also mining related contract workers, business people, administrators and pensioners to be found in the area. The black residents in the villages (Kgautswane and Maepa) are subsistence farmers, civil servants, teachers, entrepreneurs, unemployed receivers of grants, pensioners and seasonal farm workers. Problems in the white community, especially the farming community include land claims, running costs, climate change and crime. In the black community, problems to be faced are unemployment and poverty, teenage pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, shattered family relationships, and a lack of clean drinking water, electricity, healthy food and medical services. This is the context in which people with their unique narratives are trying to make sense of their everyday lives. A postmodern practical theology starts with people's experiences in these concrete situations.

Albert Nolan (1987:131) states that theology speaks of, and speaks to, “a particular time in a particular place about a particular situation”. Thus, theological thinking and research starts in a social context, with questions that come from our involvement in our own time and place. Practical theological research should be developed from a specific and concrete context (Müller 2003:294), because truth is not eternal, unchanging and absolute. In contrast to the modernist approach, the emphasis is on local knowledge instead of universal truths and it aims to be temporary instead of timeless.

Gerkin (1986:42) says the following on theological reflection:

Beginning in a situation in the present that raises practical questions, theological reflection not only looks back toward the narrative themes, metaphors, and images from the past that may inform the present situation, it also looks ahead and involves imaginative possibilities for one or other future.

In this research, the starting point in finding meaning was in the lived experiences of the community and the individuals living within the community. The primary data was captured at grass-roots level - what people were feeling, what they experienced, how they perceived things and how they responded (Cochrane, de Gruchy & Petersen 1991:17). It meant that the co-researchers and I had to listen in the closest way possible, with the greatest respect for the experiences of others. It was about finding meaning, constructed by a particular society and its history, in a concrete condition (Cochrane, de Gruchy & Petersen 1991:34).

In addition to a postmodern research methodology, African theology also views the context as a formulator of being church. Mgojo (1987:114) says that the church should take time to listen to the experiences and day-to-day struggles of the people in a community, and then give a voice to those experiences. During apartheid, a specific discourse of God was imposed on people from outside, which resulted in a church that did not make much of a difference in people's lives. Within a postmodern theology, this discourse of God can be deconstructed: We only know God in God's relationships, within a specific time frame, and under specific historical circumstances (Heroldt 1998:226).

3.2.3 Human participation and narrative practice

In the church, the value of human participation in constructing meaning is significant. A postmodern practical theology hopes to heal the fragmentation between subject and object, and it deems the partaking of the "subject" as essential to understanding (Heroldt 1998:218). The will of God is something that humans participate in. According to Heroldt (1998:217), the will of God is not "a predetermined decision that Christians need to discover in a passive mode of obedience". Meaning is integrated into a network of experiences, incidents and community (Heroldt 1998:218). Humans co-determine the plan for their lives. God is a creative participant in our lives, and we are co-

creators. Human participation is valued in the quest for wholeness and meaning in a multi-levelled reality (Heroldt 1998:217, 218).

A further aspect of a postmodern praxis in the church is that outside expert opinion about God and humanity, is not the only rationale to take note of. People who are usually considered “non-literate” in this field, are the authors of their own stories - they are the experts on their experiences. This results in a concern for the voices of the marginalised, who are included into the discourse (Rossouw 1993:902). In this regard, Rossouw states: “Expertise must be enriched and informed by the experience of those on the receiving side of expert opinion. This postmodern emphasis becomes especially clear in the concern for those who have been marginalised in the modern culture - those who were socially rejected by modern society and those who are not fit to compete in modern society.”

Within practical theological research, there is the notion of inter-subjectivity between researcher and participant and the mutual creation of data. “In a certain sense, participants are also doing research, for they, along with the researcher, construct the meanings that become ‘data’ for later interpretation by the researcher” (Olesen 1994:166). According to Müller (2009:7) “there is a real concern about a real person - concerns are never theoretical, but always local and embodied.”

In this study, the research participants were included as co-researchers from the start. This was made possible by using a *narrative research practice*. Clandinin and Connelly (1991:265) argue that narrative inquiry involves a process where the researcher and the participant jointly live out their narratives. Participants are continuing to tell their own stories, but the stories are now being lived out in a collaborative setting. The data for this particular collaboratively lived narrative of co-researchers in Ohrigstad, involved field notes of the shared experience, and transcripts of stories shared between the

researcher and co-researchers, and between the co-researchers themselves (Clandinin & Connelly 1991:265).

Gerkin (1986:26) says that all things human are in some sense rooted in, or find their deepest structural framework in a narrative or story of some kind. Whether we are members of a Christian, scientific or any other community, a story of possibilities and hypotheses, of the way things are, have been, and will be, is necessarily formed. These stories are continually shaping our lives.

In the Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe's book, *Anthills of the Savannah*, the white-bearded leader of the fictional Abazon delegation in Kangan, explains the power of stories:

So why do I say that the story is chief among his fellows? The same reason I think that our people sometimes will give the name Nkolika to their daughters - *Recalling-Is-Greatest*. Why? Because only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do us the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us. It is the thing that makes us different from cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their neighbours... So the arrogant fool who sits astride the story as though it were a bowl of foo-foo set before him by his wife understands little about the world

Achebe 1987:119.

The same sentiment is expressed by the South African writer, Ellen Kuzwayo. Africa, she says, is a place of storytelling: "We need more stories, never mind how painful the exercise may be. This is how we will learn to love one another.

Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone else's eyes" (quoted from Van Vugt & Cloete 2000: 196).

Using a narrative approach does not imply that stories, only, are shared. Stories need to be interpreted as well. Human beings are interpretive beings - we are active in the interpretation of our experiences as we live our lives (White 1995:13). We live by the stories we have about our lives. The stories of our lives provide frames that enable us to interpret our experiences. In the narrative research conversations in Ohrigstad, I listened to the "stories of people struggling in real situations, not merely to a description of a general context" (Müller 2003:295).

The narrative approach gives a voice to the co-researchers, especially to those who are marginalised. Narrative questions are not rhetorical or pedagogical questions, which are enforced on participants from outside (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:34). In the narrative approach to this research, God was not brought into the conversation by the researcher - people told their stories about their experiences and a safe space was created for them, if they chose to do so, to express how God and the Bible relate to the stories of their lives. The Bible with the story of Jesus and of the people of Israel and its metaphors, became a complementary narrative to the story of participants' lives and the story of the bigger context, in constructing meaning (Rossouw 1993:899). The questions I asked created space, and facilitated a mode conducive to dialogue, rather than demanding specific answers.

I invited the co-researchers to tell their stories in their own way. They controlled the topics raised, while I was in a *not knowing* position (Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001: 4). A not knowing position assumes that the co-researcher is the expert on his/her own experience. The skill of the researcher is the expertise to participate in creating new meaning (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:28).

A narrative approach is in line with a postmodern practical theology in that it is sensitive and descriptive, and according to Müller it is also “bold in its deconstruction of negative discourses and in its development of new alternative stories” (Müller 2003:305).

In the narrative research discussions, we not only explored the problem areas of life, but also the possible alternative stories (Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001:3). Narrative interviewing, according to White (1995:13), provides a context that contributes to the exploration of other, more preferred ways of living and thinking. At the same time, narrative discussions enable us to redress injustice, and help to reveal the unstated cultural assumptions that contributed to the original construction of misunderstanding and prejudice (Monk et al 1996:8).

As will be seen in Chapter Seven, narrative conversations enabled the participants to take responsibility. The way we talked about race, class, tradition and our differences on these discourses, enabled us to see how it affected our relationships and our way of thinking (Freedman & Combs 1996:47). Hence, this research does not merely end with a conclusion, but with new possibilities (Müller, Van Deventer & Human 2001: 4).

In the research conversations I had with members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad, a community of knowledge created new meaning within the specific context, through telling their own narratives (see Chapter Seven, where I elaborate on the conversations). In a pastoral sense, the conversations made it clear that this contextual, inclusive narrative approach to understanding is also a helpful way for the members of URCSA and the DRC to deconstruct misunderstanding and discovering new possibilities.

3.3 A Prophetic stance

When I first decided to conduct this research, I was motivated by the importance of a prophetic stance in doing theology. A prophetic stance focuses on taking responsibility for the lives of human beings and their relationships in the context we live in. Gerkin (1991:126) states that churches around the world are often frightened by the presence of the poor and marginalised. Instead of getting involved, congregations move to safer, more comfortable environments. But, according to Pieterse (1996:60) the church in South Africa has to resist the temptation of returning to an inwardly focused stance, especially after the official apartheid system has been dislodged. The church has to realise that being in the world means to “roll up our sleeves and get into the thick of everyday politics and development” (Pieterse 1996:60).

According to Müller (2009:27), in order to be a voice for disempowered people, the church has to live in the gap between rich and poor, black and white, government and ordinary people, and church and culture. He goes further to say church members have to learn that grace and faith and land ownership, church services and providing resources, prayer and healthcare, worship and the sharing of luxuries, bible study and housing, Pentecost and pit toilets - all are part of being church for an underprivileged world.

This means that the church should be especially sensitive to the practical consequences that theological perspectives and belief practices might have on people (Rossouw 1993:903). Concern for the marginalised is a huge challenge for practical theology. From this perspective, Christina Landman (2011:534) says that the church should become not only a moral leader - it must dirty its hands in the quest for justice. Practical theology should particularly be concerned with the human dignity of those who are socially, economically, and religiously marginalised (Rossouw 1993:903).

In South Africa today, the church has the major task of speaking with a prophetic voice against the prominent beliefs of the mainline Protestant churches of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the so-called mainline Protestant churches, the results of the rise to dominance of the white middle class during the previous two centuries are evident:

The meaning of Christian presence and white middle class respectability became so fused with each other that the deeper biblical meanings of Christian presence in the world have tended to become obscured. Those middle class ways of being Christian tended to emphasise class-oriented and male-dominated images of virility, independence, and capitalistic boosterism.

Gerkin 1991:94

In contrast, a postmodern theology sees the task of the church in this world as prophetic (Gerkin 1991:77; Pieterse & Theron 1994:152). According to Gerkin (1991:77), the Old Testament prophets were ordinary people who began to see the commonly accepted practices of their people through the lenses of an alternative consciousness. The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us” (Brueggemann 1987:12).

Within a postmodern culture, there is a moral shift from “being right” to “doing right.” It means that ethical accountability exceeds empirical evidence in research and in the way the church conducts itself in the world (Venter 2012:65). In a postmodern practical theology, Christians are challenged by the cross of Christ to live a life of love, but in order that it not be just a case of idealism and sentimentality, this love has to be practiced in history and it has to become involved in the politics of justice (De Gruchy 1993:67).

Liberation⁹ and feminist¹⁰ theology has a focused attention on the special concern displayed in Scripture for the marginalised (Rossouw 1993:902). The emphasis is on God's presence within the realities of life, and there is a call to praxis, which flows from that (Baard 2011:241). In this sense, the church has a calling for a practical response to human needs (Baard 2001:241).

Liberation theology places a high premium on the fact that in becoming human in Jesus, God was not born in the sumptuous palaces of kings. Rather, God took on the nature of a slave. God came down from God's throne and chose to be born of poor parents, to live and die as a poor and oppressed human being to give the oppressed new life and hope. In doing so, God chose to identify with human suffering and pain, and to win freedom and life in its fullness for the downtrodden (Maimela 1998:118).

The well-known liberation theologian James Cone (1970:1; 21; 230-233) states that theology ceases to be theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed. Theology can never be neutral or fail to take sides on issues related to the plight of the oppressed. Cone argues that, in participating in the historical liberation of God, the task of the church is to actively share in the liberation struggle, making the gospel message a social, economic and political reality. Cone quotes Bonhoeffer when he calls the church "Christ existing as a community". The church as a fellowship is a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality. This places the church squarely in the context of the world - the church cannot be church in isolation

⁹ Liberation theology seeks to analyse the meaning of Christ's liberation for oppressed communities. It views the Christian message as interrelated with the struggle for political, social and economic justice for the poor (Cone 1970:14).

¹⁰ Feminist theology developed from the secular Women's Movement of the 1960's. It compels theologians to look at problems of gender, race, marginalisation and social injustice from a perspective of faith. It strives to make the world more human and more just (Keane 1998:122).

from human suffering. Cone says that the world is not a metaphysical entity, nor an ontological problem - it is very concrete.

The expression of the church's prophetic task in the world includes an awareness of dominance over persons and of systemic evil (Gerkin 1991:163; Balcomb 1998:63). James Poling (1996:15) defines systemic evil as follows:

Evil is the abuse of power in personal, social, and religious forms that destroys bodies and spirits. Evil is an abuse of power because the power of life comes from God, and all power should be used for good. Whenever power is used to destroy the bodies and spirits of God's creation, there is evil.

Feminist theology, in carefully re-examining the sacred texts of Christian tradition, emphasises the concept of accountability. It examines the status quo, pronouncing judgement, and calls for repentance from the dominant ways of thinking, which usually marginalises people (Gerkin 1991:45). Accountability "implies an acute awareness of injustice" (Ackerman 1996a:45). It requires "a hearing of and identifying with the voices from the outer circles and a resolve to live in such a way that the common good is advanced" (Ackermann 1996:45). Accountability is ultimately tested in the reality of the wellbeing of all.

In the South African context, accountability was absent in the universal dogmas that the white church and the apartheid regime believed to be the truth. In our present context, mutual accountability contributes towards allaying decades of suspicion and mistrust, and hastens the work of healing (Ackermann 1996:46). This is precisely what played out in the research conversations: In sharing their narratives, participants took responsibility to build trust, and to heal the relationship between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad.

3.4 Intercultural and interdisciplinary conversation

The way meaning is constructed in a postmodern practical theology, opens the possibility for intercultural dialogue. In this research, white members of the DRC and black members of URCSA listened carefully to each other while sharing their narratives, and together they constructed new understanding. In Chapter Seven, I describe these intercultural conversations, and how sharing each other's unique narratives made understanding possible.

It is possible - and important - for theologians to be in dialogue with other disciplines. The postmodern theologian, Marius Heroldt (1998:228) states that modernism and a postmodern approach have in common that both accept the reality of an external world of science as well as the reality of local cultural expressions. The difference between the two is that a postmodern perspective, in contrast to modernism, refrains from awarding autonomous meaning to the external world. In a postmodern theology we know that contemporary worldviews and scientific insights, even postmodernism itself, are only temporary - until better insights are found.

Developments in the natural sciences - for example quantum theory, chaos theory and complexity theory - make it clear that physical reality is more subtle than previously had been believed. Christoph Schwobel (2000: 111) states that the effects of scientific enquiry can no longer be limited to the field of science - they effect all our interpretations of reality - therefore the humanities and religion cannot stand aside. Humanities and religion can and have to enter into public dialogue with all the sciences. This differs from a fractured modernist approach where there is a realm of science on the one hand, and on the other hand, a realm of imagination, which is the domain of morality, of the humanities and of religion (Nurnberger 2007:11; Schwobel 2000:121).

A postmodern practical theology calls for a richer account of reality and truth than the strictly reductionist physicalism of the past (Polkinghorne and Welker

2000:6). The effects of current scientific studies affect the manner in which reality is interpreted. For this reason, even without universal rules for rationality, different cultures and disciplines can converse with each other in a meaningful way. We can learn to listen to the findings of various disciplines and cultures (Schwobel 2000:120). This has important implications for theology. Schwobel states that if the above-mentioned issues are taken up in science and humanities, theology “cannot stand aside and leave their own domain to the interpretive efforts of others” (2000:111).

As reality is multi-layered, and because all disciplines are concerned with patterns and complex systems, there is a reopening of interdisciplinary dialogue between different disciplines (Heroldt 1998:228). The disciplines and methods are on equal footing, and this makes mutual enrichment possible. In a postmodern context, both theology and natural sciences acknowledge that reality cannot be fully known. On the one hand, a better coherence and more authentic theological statements are made possible (Heroldt 1998: 228). On the other hand, an overestimation of one’s own discipline and culture and its possibilities - where the other’s point of view is merely integrated in one’s own domain of knowledge - is curbed (Müller 2009:4).

Concerning interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue, I find the postfoundational¹¹ theologian, Wentzel van Huyssteen’s *transversal rationality*

¹¹ Postfoundationalism questions our uncritically held foundationalist assumptions (Van Huyssteen 1997:4), and undertakes a free and critical exploration of the interpretive roots of all our beliefs. It recognises that we relate to our world through interpreted experience, especially in religious matters. A postfoundational approach frees theologians to “reflect from within a personal faith commitment and in a cross-disciplinary conversation” (Van Huyssteen 1997:4). Van Huyssteen states that a postfoundationalist conversation allows for the evaluation of the role of experience, of tradition and of the classic biblical text, as we ask how this shaping criteria can help us determine why and how we hold on to our beliefs of God. With a postfoundational theology, we can overcome the kind of “fideism in which our

helpful. Van Huyssteen explores the possibility for theology to engage in conversation with other disciplines. Congruent with a postmodern theology, transversal rationality questions our uncritically held modernist assumptions. Van Huyssteen states that, in the scientific world, especially the micro worlds of quantum physics and ecosystems, it became evident that the process of observation may alter the object itself. The observer becomes part of an interactive system. The object can never be observed in itself - it is always an object in relationship with the observer. He argues that in this sense, there are remarkable overlaps between theology and science, because all rationalities are trying to make sense of the world and solve problems (1997:20).

Even though we use different methods and vocabularies, we can engage in a fruitful dialogue, particularly when we are dealing with the same problems. Because both science and theology may offer complimentary interpretations of the dimensions of our experience, scientists and theologians both make cognitive claims about the same world (Van Huyssteen 1997:15).

Van Huyssteen (1999:44-45) continues that in a post-Kuhn era, there is no sharp line of isolation between scientific rationality and other forms of rationality. Since the same kind of interpretive procedures is at work in all our varied reasoning strategies, there is now a blurred distinction between the natural and the human sciences. This leads to a mutual enrichment between theology and other disciplines.

A transversal rationality undertakes a free and critical exploration of the interpretive roots of all our beliefs. This allows for the evaluation of the role of experience, of tradition and of the classic biblical text, as we ask how these

own experiences and explanations are never challenged or contested and the kind of nonfoundationalism in which the need for trans-communal or intersubjective conversation is not taken seriously" (Van Huyssteen 1997:4, 5).

shaping criteria can help us determine why and how we hold on to our beliefs of God (Van Huyssteen 1997:4). As with postmodern theology, a transversal rationality does not give up the notion of an external world, but it recognises that we relate to our world through interpreted experience, especially in religious matters. It wants to transcend the modernist dualism that would set up natural against supernatural and demands a choice between the two (Van Huyssteen 1997:27). A Christian theologian is “freed to reflect from within a personal faith commitment and in a cross-disciplinary conversation.” (Van Huyssteen 1997:4).

Van Huyssteen (1997:24) states that a transversal rationality attempts to overcome the kind of fideism where religious faith, practices and experiences are restricted to the perspective, worldview and judgments of the subject alone. To critically interact with both classical texts and experience is of great importance. Transversal rationality has an interdisciplinary location, which (unlike austere relativism) does not assume that cultures are self-contained worlds that never interact (Van Huyssteen 1997:36). It provides space for intersubjective conversation to challenge our own experience (Van Huyssteen 1997:4, 5). Van Huyssteen (1997:38) calls this conversation *authentic pluralism*. He argues that in dialogue with other disciplines, we can hope to “discover some clues, indications, or forms of persuasive evidence that will help us push forward the limits of our own disciplines” (Van Huyssteen 1997:17).

Van Huyssteen’s (2000:22) use of the term transversal rationality is consequential for practical theology and research. Concerning transversal rationality, he states the following:

Talk about the human subject is now revisioned by resituating the human subject in the space of communicative praxis. Thus, the notion of transversal rationality opens up the possibility to focus on patterns of

discourse and action as they happen in our communicative practices, rather than focusing on the structure of the self, ego, or subject.

Interdisciplinary conversations are an integral part of practical theology (Müller 2003:303), and Van Huyssteen's transversal rationality is helpful in that it is concrete and local, but at the same time it reaches to transdisciplinary concerns. A balance is pursued between our interpreted experience, and broader networks of understanding (Müller 2011:6). Transversal rationality provides space for researchers to have rigorous interdisciplinary conversation with colleagues in the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, African studies, feminist studies, etc. (Venter 2012:63). It enables us to look beyond the boundaries of our own discipline and our local groups and cultures, and conveys with other disciplines without becoming identical (Van Huyssteen 1997:5).

Van Huyssteen uses the term *wide reflective equilibrium* to describe an optimal but fragile communal understanding. We can communicate across borders and move transversally from context to context, from tradition to tradition, and from discipline to discipline. In this reflective equilibrium, Van Huyssteen finds the notion of a *safe and fragile space* for shuttling back and forth between personal convictions and the principles that result from interpersonal judgements (Müller 2009:8).

This is valuable for practical theological research, but it is also a challenge to the church: the church has a role to play in the public sphere, instead of being an institution that only caters for people's private religious needs (Schwobel 2000:121).

In this research, I applied interdisciplinary dialogue by sharing the transcripts of the group discussion between members of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad with a senior lecturer who does research in language and history at

the Tshwane University of Technology. His reflection as well as my commentary on his remarks are to be found in Chapter Eight.

3.5 Conclusion

If Christians are to minister effectively in a postmodern world, they have to understand the times and the seasons in which they live (Dockery 1995:15; Heyns 1996:625). Theological reflection cannot escape social realities and conflicts, and new positions require new approaches (Venter 2012:47). A practical theology that tends to be a timeless and closed system of theological knowledge, unaffected by cultural shifts, runs the risk of becoming obsolete (Rossouw 1993:895). To remain relevant, we must constantly switch from one paradigm to another as determined by the spirit of the time (Heroldt 1998:228). Heroldt (1998:454) states that a reflection on the process of understanding and doing research is clearly influenced by the frame of reference that is used - it is intrinsically linked to epistemology, or the theory of knowledge.

That is why it is important for the church - as well as for me as a researcher within the church in South Africa - to utilise a postmodern spirituality of wholeness; human participation through narratives in the construction of meaning within the specific context, a prophetic stance where doing right is more important than being right, and intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue.

I now proceed to Chapter Four, where I portray ubuntu language as a discourse prominent in our South African context. I explore its possibilities for narrative conversations in this research between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad.

Chapter 4

Ubuntu language

Ubuntu language implies a way of life. It is a way of describing being human in an actual context, in a relationship with people and communities. When I describe ubuntu language, I understand language to be more than just words: language constitutes our lives and we live through language (see Chapter Two). Ubuntu language is more than just a word or a term, a superficial set of rules or a methodology. It is not an abstract term separated from other things in life (Dandala 2009: 260). Ubuntu language encompasses the essence of being (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology), and a collective consciousness expressed through an ethics of life, which guides relations at personal, communal and structural levels. I agree with Munyaka and Mothlabi (2009:65) when they describe ubuntu language:

Ubuntu is more than just a manifestation of individual acts. It is a spiritual foundation, an inner state, an orientation, and a disposition towards good, which motivates, challenges and makes one perceive, feel and act in a humane way towards others. It is a way of life that seeks to promote and manifest itself and is best realised or made evident in harmonious relations within society.

In this chapter, I explore the relevant literature on ubuntu, while asking the question: can ubuntu language be a discourse that provides new possibilities for the relationship between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad? I discuss the term ubuntu; ubuntu language as discourse; how ubuntu language is interpreted as past, present and future; and the possibilities that ubuntu language may offer to the church in South Africa.

4.1 The meaning of the term ubuntu

Ubuntu is a richly laden concept that is used to underscore a variety of meanings and values. While the concept of ubuntu is often utilised, a clear formulation of what it entails is less accessible. It is difficult to translate the meaning in Western languages (LenkaBula 2008:379).

Ubuntu is a Nguni ¹² term, which describes the interrelatedness of human beings. The prefix is *ubu*, which means “being,” and is oriented to the root *ntu*, which refers to “human” (Ramose 2002:36). According to Mogobe Ramose (2002:50), ubuntu is two words in one: *ubu* manifests itself in *ntu*. The term emphasises humanness - where people become human beings, only through other human beings, in community with each other and creation. Moral values such as respect, compassion and hospitality are closely connected to ubuntu (Hankela 2012:i). In IsiTsonga the word translates as *vumunhi* (Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009:63). The Tshivenda term is *vhutu*, which is derived from *muthu* (human being) and *vhatu* (human beings or people). Wilhelm van Deventer (2015:3) states that *vhutu* cannot be defined in terms of delineated words such as humanity and humanness: it can only be constructed through narrative experiences, interpretations and reflections. *Botho* is the Setswana and Sesotho word, which describes respect for humanity, and the right relationship with others and myself. The Basotho words: *motho ke motho ka batho ba bang* translate as “no person is complete in him/herself... a person is fully human in as far as he/she remains a part of the web of life.” This includes the whole of creation (LenkaBula 2008:375).

Ubuntu is not unique to South Africa - it is represented in different African cultures, and is described by various terms. For instance, in Tanzania the word *ujamaa*, can roughly be translated as “familyhood” or “family style” (Meiring 1987:24). In Zambia, Dr Kenneth Kaunda stated in 1971: “There is no

¹² Nguni is the language group which includes Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swati.

doubt at all that the greatest blessing bestowed on Africa... is that we have always had a gift for Man (*sic*) enjoying the fellowship of Man simply because he is Man. This is at the heart of our traditional culture... We have held, and we still hold, that Africa's gift to world culture must be in the field of human relations" (1971:40-42).

4.2 Ubuntu language as a discourse

Ubuntu language is not a static phenomenon or a set of rules. It is not a single truth - it has many truths in different contexts. It is a discourse with numerous meanings. Eze (2010:161) writes that ubuntu language as discourse "is not a closed system but a history, open ended, and constitutively dialogical." Ubuntu language as a discourse is not superior or inferior to other discourses, but, as with other beneficial discourses, it can enrich our understanding of others and ourselves (Munyaka & Mothlabi 2009:68).

Ubuntu language is a discourse which understands a person not to be a separate identity - a person is constituted to be relational, a sociality. This awareness is fundamental to an African understanding of identity, ontology and epistemology (LenkaBula 2008:382). In addition, it has many similarities to a social construction discourse, which challenges a positivist Western discourse that defines a human being as separate, autonomous and shaped by being rational. As with the social construction discourse, ubuntu language as discourse "affirms that all persons are a network of cognitive, affective and other domains. These include the social, political, religious and economic systems which inform and shape their lives and identities" (LenkaBula 2008:384). Opposed to a positivist approach which is essentially rational, pragmatic, fragmented and instrumental (Du Toit 2005:853), ubuntu discourse portrays a corporate, communal way of life that stands in opposition to hierarchical, discriminatory, individualistic either-or reasoning. Murove

(2009:27) states that, in contrast to a worldview that perceives things as independent and separate, ubuntu language incorporates past, present and future in such a way as to express an existential symbiosis. Hence, an ubuntu discourse is consistent with a narrative approach (Paul 2009:14), which places emphasis on experience as translated and retranslated within the language of a specific social ethos (Murove 2009: 29).

I explained in Chapter Two that I choose to refer to a social construction discourse as an alternative to social constructionism. In that way I intend to avoid speaking about this position as a closed dogmatic system - it is relative, rather than absolute (Ramose 1999:62). In the same way ubuntu language as a discourse always depicts a *-ness* and not an *-ism*: it is not fixated on ideas and practices which are unchangeable, and its epistemology is inclined towards a social construction of knowledge (Ramose 2002:51,163). Ubuntu language as discourse is likewise not the same as *humanism*, for humanism has the perspective of a human being as a separate, static, object. It is more suitable to translate ubuntu language as *humanness*, because humanness regards humans as part of a complex, multi-layered, interactive universe (Ramose 2002:155).

The ethics of the social construction discourse supposes that human beings are makers of the truth, and not made by the truth, therefore humans live the truth rather than living by a truth out there. Ethics is not a subject examined separately from a specific context. This resembles the ethics of ubuntu language as discourse, which is all-encompassing and inseparable from all spheres of existence (Murove 2009:28). As is the case with the social construction discourse, and a prophetic contextual theology, ubuntu discourse is concrete, contextual and has a strong social consciousness (Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 73).

Ubuntu ethics is active and continual (Ramose 2002:61, 62). It observes and reflects on the social life of people, with its traditions, rituals and relationships

(Richardson 2009: 129). Hankela (2012:50) states that our moral obligation in ubuntu discourse is to become more fully human. Ethics is about how best to integrate the different forces that constitute a person, and the lived discourse of ubuntu language means that a person becomes more fully human through the way one lives in the community (Shutte 2009: 85). Relational qualities, for example caring, sharing, compassion and kindness are deeply rooted in the ubuntu discourse on ethics (Hankela 2012:51). As with a prophetic theology (see Chapter Three), moral agency and decision making is realised by the balance between self-interest and the common good of the community and the web of life in general (LenkaBula 2008:384).

Ubuntu language, as any discourse, has a constitutive effect on people and societies. The language people use when talking about ubuntu, can shape its manifestation in society. Thus, in the following paragraphs I discuss the way people talk about ubuntu language.

4.3 The way people talk about ubuntu language: past, present and future

Elina Hankela (2012:37-39) states that, in the academic discussion of ubuntu, the understanding of ubuntu language depends on the author's understanding of it in the context of the past, present or future. People tend to talk about ubuntu language either as a past commodity, which must be retrieved (4.3.1), or as a present and future language, which can be investigated (4.3.2). This can have an effect on how ubuntu language establishes itself.

4.3.1 Ubuntu language as past tradition - restorative nostalgia

Ubuntu language in the context of the past accentuates tradition as the origin thereof. In such an approach, ubuntu belongs to the good old days of the African village, and by returning to past traditions, it can be retrieved. It is a

longing for the way things used to be, when things were better (Müller 2015:2, 3). The past is viewed through rose-tinted spectacles as something idyllic, where there were no rich or poor, where all were cared for and everything was good (Bosch 1991:155; Richardson 2009: 151).

Müller (2015:2, 3) uses the term *restorative nostalgia*. With restorative nostalgia, ubuntu becomes “I long, therefore I am”, instead of “I am because we are”. Restorative nostalgia longs for a place that is missed, and yearns for a different time. According to Müller, restorative nostalgia tends to confuse itself with truth and tradition. Consequently, there is a tendency toward essentialist thinking: ubuntu language becomes a truth “out there”, which must be protected and obtained by going back to the correct tradition. It furthermore operates with selective memory, and uses symbols that are disconnected from real contexts. It oversimplifies conceptions of good and evil, and overlooks the complexity of history and the reality of new contexts. The danger of this nostalgic stance is that it can create patterns of discrimination against people who are seen as “other” to one’s own community and tradition. The idealisation of past tradition can make it difficult to adapt to the challenges of evolving socio-economic and political milieus (Ramphela 2008:74). The way in which the co-researchers in Ohrigstad describe restorative nostalgia concerning community, asks for attention. According to them there is the belief that, if you are not born in Ohrigstad, or even if your parents came from another town, you are not considered to be part of the local culture. People might say a person is an *inkommer* (incomer). Co-researchers would say to me: “You do not have to talk to that person about your research - he/she does not know - he/she is an *inkommer*.”

Sipho of URCSA in Ohrigstad says:

I have not been staying here my whole life. Therefore, in Ohrigstad, I am an *inkommer*. I stay in the mission house. In our area, they have a toilet project in all the houses, but they skipped my house. When I

made an inquiry, somebody said: “You are not a resident of this area.” Also, in our congregation, when I have been here for 3 or 4 years, one member said to me: “This area is favourable to outsiders”. She meant well, but I knew I was an “outsider.” But it is not bad.

A member of the DRC in Ohrigstad says:

I have been living in Ohrigstad for about thirty years. This is a pleasant community, with people who care for each other a lot. We also have *inkommers*, who came looking for a home, or who came to farm.

Where there is a fixation on tradition, the “other” is excluded because of his/her different roots, culture, race, sexual orientation, religion etc. The inclusion of the “other” becomes based upon our bias, prejudices and rigid mind-sets (Eze 2011:304). Subsequently, to be accepted, one must become culturally “proper”, and one who does not share a similar tradition, is not similarly valued. This develops in stereotyping, stigmatisation, rejection, denunciation, and can even result in mass killings of outsiders (Eze 2011:304).

A nostalgia for past tradition can cause ubuntu language losing its universal sense, being interpreted in a narrow, nationalistic, ethnic and familial way. Naudé (2011:502) argues that consequently, I start using my power in the community to benefit those who are “of my own”. Then “I am a person through the ones close to me, and they benefit by my exclusion of others not from my nation, tribe, family or political party”. This interpretation of ubuntu language causes factionalism and the pursuit of power, money and positions.

Ubuntu language embraces the idea of dynamic communities. However, if such a community becomes absolute, the identity of a particular community becomes normative. It becomes an intolerant society, and cannot share power

with any other group, which leads to totalitarianism. White Afrikaner nationalism was an example of such a totalitarian society (Touraine 2000:164). In African anthropology, it can manifest in jealousy and suspicion, even scapegoating and accusations of witchcraft (Bosch 1991:156).

Adhering to past tradition as absolute truth, can also cause the “good of the community” to have an oppressive effect. Nürnberger (2007:190) says that to “outperform” others was traditionally seen as asocial behaviour. For instance, farmworkers who acquired modern skills on the farms they worked at would not dare apply them at home. In a parish where Nürnberger worked, there was a man who went to college, but because of that, he never dared to voice an opinion.

It may well be the reason for the following story of a research participant:

There are times when I just do not understand. When there is a desire within young people... they put themselves in a disadvantage... they choose the difficult path of farming, because they want to help people. They start farming with the whole community in mind; they empower previously disadvantaged people by letting them take over the farm with lodges on it, so that the whole community can benefit from it in the end. Then members of the community burned down the lodges... it is as if they could not grant each other progress and prosperity.

4.3.2 Ubuntu language as present and future - reflective nostalgia

Restorative nostalgia should not be replaced with its opposite - cynicism and condemnation (Richardson 2009:151). Ramose (2002:130) states that tradition must function as “a source from which to extract elements that will help in the construction of an authentic and emancipative epistemological paradigm relevant to the conditions in Africa at this moment.” In contrast, what is needed is a *reflective nostalgia* that views traditional practices

sensitively in terms of their context and communal history, and in terms of an evolving future. Ubuntu becomes something one does, something that evolves, and that has meaning in the specific context.

Eze (2010:162) states that, in order for ubuntu language to be meaningful, it should be seen in continuity with history, but not as the end of history, or as history itself. Ramphela (2008:75) writes about dynamism in society, where, for instance, harmful or oppressive aspects of a culture can be identified and changed. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (2001:271; 272) ubuntu rests upon the conviction that persons and relations are the unfolding product of social construction, and that throughout life (even after death as a narrated presence), a person has the potential to engage in an act of completing him/herself.

In this sense, Hankela emphasises the idea of a human being as *being becoming*. Being becoming means that humanness is not a static state - "a human being becomes rather than is" (Hankela 2012:47). She quotes Ramose, saying that motion is the principle of being: "Ubuntu is lived and as it is lived it is discovered as a relational process that is not predetermined" (Hankela 2012:47). Ubuntu language then, means to temporarily become. It describes a condition of being, but it is also the recognition of being becoming (Hankela 2012:47). Ubuntu as being becoming always leads to yet another action or state of being (Ramose 2002:192). Hankela notes that being and becoming cannot be separated from each other - it forms an organic whole, thus a human being is being becoming (Hankela 2012:48).

Müller (2015:2, 3) argues that ubuntu language is and should be the language of becoming, and not the language of achievement. He employs the example of Jewish teaching, in which the ethical notion of goodness is not ontological, but related to the notion of becoming. This, indeed, is reflective nostalgia (Müller 2015:2). Reflective nostalgia recognises the paradoxes of human longing and belonging. It asks for critical engagement with ubuntu language

and its usage and effect in modern culture. Reflective nostalgia is “more open for details and not carried away by symbols”. It tries to deconstruct ubuntu language by exploring alternative viewpoints, untold stories and different ways of being. Reflective nostalgia keeps in mind that a person is always being becoming, and that humanness suggests a ceaseless unfolding and movement (Ramose 2009:308).

An example of reflective nostalgia is Sam, a research participant’s story. In Sam’s story, he finds himself in new circumstances. In his context, he had to find a way to take aspects of his own background, and shape it into a new story of becoming. In the process, people whom he had contact with, also changed:

Sam: I am part of the local rugby team: When I located here (in town, from the village), this was Afrikaner town, there were no blacks and now there are six black households. I am a sports person - I play soccer, but here is no soccer team and I cannot stay without jogging. Here was only a rugby team with only whites. I felt let me just go and see how they react. I spoke to the coach and he was very welcoming. He even encouraged me to bring others from the village so that the team could grow. The management did not have an attitude - they were accommodating. However, initially you could see among the players those who did not understand why I was there. The coach introduced me. Afrikaners always shake hands and there were those you could see dodged me with the hand shaking. I would think: this one has problem - maybe in time... The larger group did not have a problem. Some still had an attitude of them and us, maybe because rugby is an Afrikaner sport. It did not bother me because I am a history teacher - I know everything about history and I understand why a person has a negative attitude. With time, everything fell into place. I have been playing for three years, and I am now enjoying their company. No one has an attitude now. Maybe at the beginning, with some people, it was

about where they were coming from. Maybe they grew up to doubt how a black person could be - maybe they associated a black person with crime and bullying. They realised this is a person we can associate with.

I asked Sam if he thought it to be a fair perception of a black person:

Sam: No, some people are driven by hunger and poverty. Blacks are the pool of have-nots. From where you are - somebody there has everything - enough food... so maybe you should go and steal.

I asked Sam if he at first had any perceptions of white Afrikaner rugby players.

Sam: Yes, as the only black person, I thought they were going to be rough on me, that they would injure me so that I could no longer play. They did not. That perception was proven wrong. I am second oldest and I felt like retiring, but they said no. Now I am also on the management of the team. I make sure the sports field is ready if there is a home match and I liaise with the local newspapers. This is my job now, but I am still playing. I have learnt about the Afrikaans culture. With team events and parties, they will come with their wives and children; they have meals and they tell me they are here for the family to bond. My younger boy always wants to go with me. I just clicked in the team. Maybe they ended up seeing I was there to help build the team. Maybe this made them look at me with a positive eye. Now we as management are organising a golf day for funds. There are things that are very different from me: they talk about outdoor life - all those boring stories. I am not used to outdoor life. One person, he is a good rugby player. He will say: "I am going on a trip for shooting animals". He

prefers that to a rugby league game. He knows we rely on him, but he goes to shoot animals. That is what takes me off guard, I do not understand.

People, like the rugby players' employees (farmworkers) keep asking me: "How do you relate to these people, what have you done for them to like you"? They do not understand. People still have suspicions; trust must be established from foundation level. I suggested to management to bring their employees to work at the gates (to sell tickets) with incoming games - it works well. Some of them are now part of us during games. They even come and watch rugby. One farmer makes his van available for the employees to come and watch.

In Sam's story, the past was reimagined in a way that directs a new present and future, instead of just recreating it in the present (Müller 2015:2, 3).

When we consider ubuntu language in the sense of reflective nostalgia and *becoming*, ubuntu can come into dialogue with other discourses. One example is Archbishop Desmond Tutu bringing ubuntu in dialogue with Christianity in his book *No future without forgiveness* (1999). In this sense, the aim is not an attempt to maintain the essence of traditional ubuntu language devoid of any context. Ubuntu language is consciously brought into dialogue with other thought systems, and is recognised to have the ability to contribute to conversations in a globalising world. The ubuntu discourse is thus seen as one that evolves and that can develop in changing contexts (Hankela 2012:39).

Ramphele (2013:47) argues that it is not only African cultures that are founded on the understanding of ubuntu language. Enid, a research participant in URCSA, agrees:

Whites are not jealous... They will share skills and they give. They organize clothes and food. It is ubuntu. It must come from your heart. But there are differences between white people: People are people; it is the same with black people. When I started working at Ohrigstad Primary School, I was the only black teacher. However, the principal and teachers were very good to me. I still phone the principal if I want help or advice. They supported me. The children were also eager to learn. I taught Sepedi, and sometimes you could not distinguish between black and white children reading the Sepedi books. The white parents still want me to teach their children Sepedi. The parents (white and black) were supportive. We also had a multi-racial choir. That school is an example, especially with that principal. She says a child is a child. When a child does wrong, she asks us not to blame the child.

Although ubuntu language as such is embedded in Africa, the values of humanity are universal (Hankela 1012:39). Many other cultures share this orientation, for instance the Japanese' *ameru* (the meeting place of all human beings), which emphasises the importance to be open, and learn from others. The Afrikaner culture also traditionally has great value for close-knit relationships. Unfortunately, this interconnectedness has been tainted by apartheid, in which white people were seen as the only ones worthy of inclusion (Ramphela 2013:48). Likewise, in South Africa, xenophobic violence leads to a type of exclusive ubuntu language. Ramphela's (2013:48) appeal to South Africans is that Afrikaners, Africans, Indians, *et al*, explore the values in our collective cultural heritage with its interconnectedness as the defining element of being human.

According to Müller (2015:2,3), to enter in dialogue with ubuntu language, we acknowledge that our understanding of how it operated in the past, as well as our own experience in our own communities today, are not based on exact

facts, but on perceptions. The dialogue is based on imagination, and it is the source of imagination. It consists of telling the stories of the past, together with the stories of the present and future. By telling and sharing these narratives, we are enabled to seek connections and common purpose. Müller (2015:4) argues that in this way we can construct preferred realities, where our individual hopes can be reconciled with the dreams of others. It can create new understandings, and find seeds of possibility, and the traces of life lived resiliently.

If an imaginative space can be socially constructed, a space in which memories of the past and insights of the present are constantly in critical interaction with each other (Richardson 2009: 152), ubuntu language can have countless possibilities in the context of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad. Below I discuss some of these possibilities.

4.4 Possibilities of ubuntu language

The South African theologian Albert Nolan (1988:195,196) states that the values of ubuntu language generate hope: “I am challenged by the hopefulness of other people... I become hopeful when I see what God is doing in and through other people, and they are no doubt affected by my hope and my commitment. We need one another”. Nolan’s hope may perhaps be unpacked in the following possibilities:

4.4.1 Ubuntu language as vitality

Ubuntu language must be seen in the context of African metaphysical thinking, especially concerning the dynamic life force, *seriti*. *Seriti* is a force or energy, which infuses everything. It means shade or shadow. “It is like an aura around the human person, an invisible shadow or cloud or mist forming

something like a magnetic or radar field... it gives forth the uniqueness of each person” (Setiloane 2000:24). *Seriti* is not life itself, but the life force, which makes life possible. It comes, ultimately, from God (the Supreme Being or Spirit), and flows through the ancestors, to humans and to animals and plants (Crafford 2015:17). It can be mediated by many agencies, for example witches, charms and the sangoma (medicine man/woman) (Du Toit 2005:851). *Seriti* is not something tangible, and is explained by a relational ontology. It binds the universe and humans together in a relationship, and therefore a harmonious relationship with the ancestors, nature and human beings is important.

The *seriti* life force is transferable. It is, according to Setiloane (2000:25, 26), an “interplay that takes place when people come into contact or live together.” Setiloane’s account provides the logical basis or mechanism that explains how a person’s vitality is activated and enhanced within relationships with other humans. This experience of life force and personhood includes ubuntu language.

Setiloane (2000:24) explains that ubuntu language not only establishes a person’s identity, but also adds vitality and potential to a human being. Mamphela (2013:47) writes about ubuntu language as an essential source of meaning and energy to engage life as individuals and communities. Setiloane (2000:25) argues that while some Western concepts of human beings give the impression that a person is like a “computer that can be programmed, and from which information and data can be retrieved at will”, the African view is that a human being (*motho umuntu*) is like a dynamo: “A human person is like a live electric wire, which is ever exuding force or energy in all directions”. Personal fulfilment and vigour is activated and enhanced within relationships with other humans. Ubuntu language is the ongoing process of mutual enrichment between the vitality of individuals and of nature. It releases creativity, and without it, communities will wither (Prozesky 2009:10; Dandala 2009: 276).

4.4.2 Ubuntu language as identity

The ontology of ubuntu language is anthropocentric (Crafford 2015:15). The Kenyan theologian, John Mbiti (1969:108, 109), describes ubuntu language as “a deeply religious *transaction*” (my emphasis), in which an individual becomes conscious of his/her own being, duties, privileges and responsibilities through other people: “I am, because we are, and since we are, I am”. Locally, the South African theologian, Gabriël Setiloane (2000:20) compares Western notions of identity for example the positivistic Cartesian dictum “I think, therefore I am”, with the African notion of “I am because I belong”. It implies that ubuntu language locates a person’s identity and worth within the community. Ubuntu suggests that each person’s humanness is truly recognised through his/her relationship with others (Paul 2009:13).

Ubuntu language places emphasis on a person’s highest and intrinsic value, from which flows mutual respect, harmonious social and interpersonal relations, stability, kindness and co-operation (Motlhabi 1987:94). Individuals exist in connectedness to other people, to the earth, to the ancestors and to God, and the value and dignity of a person is attained in relationship with others (LenkaBula 2008:386; Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 68). Personal identity and dignity derives from relationships, and to respect another human being is to respect oneself. The potential of a person’s identity becomes revealed and actualised in practical human relations (Ramosé 2009:420).

According to Segun Gbadegesin (2004:60), personal life purpose and identity cannot be separated from the community of which a person is only a part. The purpose and identity of individual existence is intricately involved with the purpose of social existence, and cannot be understood outside of it. Ubuntu language confirms personal identity, and personality becomes meaningful within community: “Community provides its members with meaning” (Gbadegesin 2004:61).

In her book *Conversations with my sons and daughters*, Mamphela Ramphele claims that the interconnectedness with our fellow human beings, which flows from ubuntu, affirms and acknowledges our human dignity (Ramphele 2013:47). She describes this by using idioms that place ubuntu language at the heart of humanness:

It is said that “so and so *ungumtu mpela*” (he or she is a real person), meaning that this person’s humanness shines through everything he or she does. For those who go astray, “*ungumtu onaje na?*” (what kind of a person are you?), is a cry of anguish by parents or close relatives who cringe at bad behaviour by one of their own. Some might add: “*Batho bat la reng na?*” (what will decent people say about your behaviour?). In other words, a person is not only known as a person by virtue of being human; it is of equal importance that he or she behaves in ways defined by the given community...

Ubuntu language shows a person’s identity as inseparably linked to creation and community. One’s personal dignity is reciprocal to another person’s dignity, and therefore the emphasis is on solidarity and humanity.

4.4.3 Ubuntu language as solidarity and humanity

Ubuntu language does not deny people’s inherent dignity, but a person’s worth goes hand in hand with solidarity and moral values which contribute to the well-being of others (Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 71). The eminent South African theologian, archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu (2011:21; 22) agrees that ubuntu realises a person’s identity, but adds that it also makes you a better human being: “A person is a person through other persons. It means that my humanity is inextricably caught up with yours”. It also means that human beings cannot exist without one another (Hulley, Kretzschmar, Pato 1996:96), and that we learn to be human through other human beings.

Consequently, people are more important than things, profits, status, race, gender or achievement (Tutu 2011:22). Tutu argues that ubuntu means: “When I dehumanise you I inexorably dehumanise myself” (Hulley, Kretzschmar, Pato 1996:102). Ubuntu not only embraces compassion and solidarity with others, it also enables humans to become humanised and humble beings that seek to maintain harmonious relationships in the community and the world beyond (God, the cosmos and the ancestors) (LenkaBula 2008:381). In this case, ubuntu language has the possibility to be a platform for a society that acknowledges the benefits of mutual empowering relationships (Ramphela: 2008:298).

According to Mbiti (1969:108), ubuntu language establishes solidarity across the community. For instance, when a person suffers, the whole group suffers. Similarly, people rejoice with their neighbours and relatives. It means that if a person has no cow, you are required to give him a cow to milk (Paul 2009:13). What happens to a person happens to the whole group. What happens to the group happens to the individual. This means that all must be allowed to fully participate in the goods and opportunities in the community (LenkaBula 2008:380).

The missionary pioneer Robert Moffat remarked on the Khoi’s sense of solidarity. He said they wept for one another, always stretching out a helping hand to widows and orphans (Setiloane 2000:22, 23). Neighbourliness led to solidarity and mutual helpfulness, which were central to the value of humanity (Mothlabi 1987:94).

A colleague in URCSA, Rev Willard Sefara (2010:7), remembers how ubuntu language had a humanising effect on the community of his childhood:

Was everybody well to do? No, but we managed! There were poor families, but they were not rejected nor neglected, neither were they conspicuous, thanks to the spirit of *botho*, popularly

known as *ubuntu*. A poor family could be given a cow to keep and it was to be returned after producing a calf or two. The poor also had fields that were ploughed with the use of other people's oxen... If you did not have matches to make fire, you got a *serumula* (a burning piece of wood) from a neighbour. A tired and hungry traveller was given food and accommodation for the night.

The consequence of ubuntu language as solidarity and humanity is a shared sense of responsibility, which leads to action and social cohesion (LenkaBula 2008:382). It encourages people to come together and try finding solutions to common issues, even when they live apart (Ramose 2002:143).

4.4.4 Ubuntu language as widening community

Dirkie, a white Afrikaans speaking research participant from the DRC related the following experience of ubuntu language as widening community:

I had an experience of humanity and compassion that stays with me: At times, some of our church members visit people in the villages in an attempt to reach out. I visited one of the poorest families. The woman was my namesake. She had nothing. I was surprised about the condition of their house, how clean and well maintained, given the meagre circumstances... I came unannounced, but everything was spotless and tidy. I remember the children's clean white shoes neatly in front of the bed. We sat in the dark zinc kitchen, drinking tea from clean tin cups. I went there to reach out, but actually, the woman reached out to me. In the end, I walked away from there with much more. She asked about my children... she prayed for my children. She included me in her life at that moment. She talked about her neighbours who always shared their porridge when she had none. She told me how far they walked to fetch firewood, and how they always sang while doing it.

She was like the woman in the Bible who, although her container was empty, still shared. She knew that the next time, someone who also did not have much would share the little he/she had with her. Until this day, I remember this woman's face vividly. It was a pleasant experience.

According to Setiloane (2000:20) ubuntu language transcends usual tribal relations and widens the African understanding of community to include people who are not part of the blood family. There is the sense that every person is related to one another. In the Shona culture for instance, all people are seen as *hama* - relatives (Murove 2009: 316). This sense of community, which extends beyond the family, clan or tribe, also includes people of different skin colour. Setiloane (2000:21) recounts that in the early days of the *trekboers*, king Ngqika took one of the *trekboers*, Coenrad de Buys, into his tribe and made him one of his councillors. Likewise, some of the Sotho-Tswana chiefs looked after the white missionaries like fathers. Motlhabi (1978:94) says that 300 years ago, the Mpondo already recognised a traveller (a foreigner) as under the protection of the chief. Ubuntu language always aimed to include, rather than exclude. Even in war, the purpose was to incorporate, rather than eliminate (Setiloane 2000:22).

Ubuntu language is often criticised as being exclusive to the tribe or family. If one speaks of ubuntu language in a restorative-nostalgic way, this might be true. But Villa-Vicencio (2009:113) quotes the following interesting paragraph by Setiloane:

Ubuntu is less romantic than is often thought. There is a bit of realpolitik in it. It is about drawing an adversary or potential opponent into the community rather than leaving him outside where he is likely to cause trouble. Inclusively understood, the idea of ubuntu reaches across intra or intercommunity divisions, whether political, religious or other. If on the other hand it is confined to the limitations of tribal and ethnic borders, it can be as vicious as any other nationalistic exclusivity.

Inclusively understood, ubuntu means we cannot turn our backs on anyone who genuinely wants to be part of the community, provided that person is ready to accept the privileges as well as responsibilities involved in being part of a family or community. Ubuntu in this sense places dialogue at the centre of what it means to be fully human. It involves a future that seeks to rise above exclusion and alienation.

Statements such as *motho ke motho ka batho* - “a person is a person through other persons”, according to Motlahbi (1987:94), are universal and are key to the traditional African’s attitude towards his/her neighbours - irrespective of who they are. According to Villa-Vicencio (2009:118), Western perspectives on justice include individual responsibility and retribution. He writes that, on the contrary, an ubuntu approach focuses on mending relationships. This means widening the community, because it includes relationships with perpetrators, involving them in building a new community. In the context of South Africa, Eze (2010:190) sees at the core of ubuntu morality, the inclusion of others into the community in all their difference.

4.4.5 Ubuntu language and individual responsibility

The ubuntu notion that individuals are individuals because of others, are sometimes criticised. LenkaBula (2008:382) shows that some scholars believe ubuntu language has the potential to constrict individual flourishing, which threatens personal responsibility. Scholars argue that ubuntu language has a potential negative side with an oppressive conformity and loyalty to the group, where it is frowned upon when one is elevated beyond the community. An ubuntu culture is sometimes perceived as turning people into passive beings who are dictated by tradition, with no room for initiative (Prozesky 2009:9).

LenkaBula agrees that any life-affirming values have the potential to be used for abusive purposes, but one cannot throw away helpful principles just because they can be used for evil intentions. Eze (2010:189) says that, while

interdependence typifies ubuntu language and humanity, an individual has the power to choose ubuntu for oneself.

Kwame Gyekye agrees that people live in a community, as in the Ghanaian proverb: “A person is not a palm tree that he/she should be self-sufficient”. But he contests the notion that an individual’s identity is merely derivative of the community. He argues that it is a mistake to think that African philosophy denies the individual, for the individual is an “intrinsically valuable child of God, intricately linked into a web of human relationships” (in Russel & Cohn 2012:93). A human being has inherent value and dignity, and the affirmation thereof is in recognising and respecting the same in others (Ramose 2002:138).

Du Toit (2005:854) argues that it would be wrong to restrict personal identity to communal identity. Personal identity is not eliminated when personhood is identified by interaction with other persons. Ubuntu language simply says that my identity *comes to the fore* in my interaction with my community (Du Toit 2005:854). A person should not be limited to communalism, and there is a right to live beyond one’s culture, to transcend one’s own surroundings (Du Toit 2005:854).

According to Du Toit (2005: 853-854), ubuntu language teaches responsibility. He argues that ubuntu language renders people to be co-responsible for one another. It establishes social harmony and balance, laying emphasis on interconnectedness (Brouwer 2011:14). It affirms relations to the self, other human beings, creation and God. Therefore, ubuntu language should not be confused with simple conformity or totalitarianism. On the contrary, it meets and respects the difference in people’s humanness so as to inform and enrich our own. Ubuntu language respects a person as an individual, whilst embracing the notion that we are embedded in relations with each other (LenkaBula 2008:383).

Ubuntu language is different from the Western idea where individual autonomy is considered more important than the relatedness of people (LenkaBula 2008:383). Although ubuntu language describes society as an organism where communion is more important than autonomy, and rejects the notion of an objective world that is separate from an individual person, Du Toit (2005: 853-854) argues that ubuntu is also different from Western socialism and communism, where the individual is seen only as a part in a machine. Ubuntu language does not take away personal identity - rather, personal identity is formed by interaction with my community. Musa Dube states that individual rights should not deny community rights, just as community rights should not deny individual rights. He says that the two should co-exist creatively, “informing each other for the benefit of both” (2009:192).

With ubuntu language, another human being becomes “another self” (Hankela 2012:49). Du Toit (2005:852) states that although African culture can be typified as sociocentric, individualism is not a foreign experience. The concept of ubuntu does not take away one’s person or personal responsibility - it enhances relationships with others.

Elias Bongmba (2012:70) states that, by raising our awareness of community, ubuntu language points to the importance of an individual’s responsibility in the community. He argues that former president Thabo Mbeki encouraged ubuntu values in his speeches to counter the negative psychology that Africans have inherited from colonial thought, which reasoned that Africans lacked responsibility and could not do anything to help themselves. Ramphele (2008:176) prompts, and warns, that the ubuntu ethos can only work where the approach to power is one that enables people to become the best they can be. She states that the more educated and confident people are, the higher the benefits for society.

4.4.6 Ubuntu language in dialogue with Christianity

In the African church, ubuntu language is a familiar notion. Setiloane (2000:22) states that the language of ubuntu has a lot in common with the language of the Christian Bible. The Old Testament prophets teach about care for the widow, orphan and the poor, and the whole Bible emphasises the value of hospitality. The Christian Bible underscores the notion of connectedness that ubuntu language advocates. Setiloane (2000:25) argues that both ubuntu language and the Christian way of life stress the significance of life together and relationships between people. That is evident in the biblical creation stories where God created humanity in relationship (LenkaBula 2008:382). Jesus teaches about love for one's neighbour and care for the marginalised. Equally, ubuntu language explains "the interplay that takes place when people come into contact or live together (Setiloane 2000:25)." Lenkabula (2008:386) argues Christianity and ubuntu language both emphasise a holistic, organic, inclusive understanding of community. Christian theology and ethics articulate this in the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, and the Cosmic Christ in whom all things are joined together (LenkaBula 2008:386). It is not surprising then, that in the conversations between members of URCSA and the DRC in this study, there was a comfortable flow between Christian- and ubuntu languages.

Although Christianity and ubuntu language have much in common, a Christian morality that has been influenced by the enlightenment may and should be enriched by a dialogue with ubuntu ethics. Whereas modernist Christian ethics thrusts towards rationality, autonomy and freedom of the individual, ubuntu language brings the focus to a contextual, socially accountable morality (Richardson 2009: 137). Modernist Christian understanding tends to make an uneasy division between secular life and religion, and between science and the sacred. On the other hand, in ubuntu language there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular - all creation is in a close relationship (Bujo 2009: 281). In dialogue with ubuntu language, Christianity can reclaim a

wholeness where religion is interwoven with all life, practices, relationships and community (Dube 2009:199).

4.5 Conclusion

Ubuntu is a language that constitutes people's lives. As language, it comprises not just the way people talk, but the way we live our lives. It is a discourse that, similar to the social construction discourse, understands reality as being socially constructed. The term ubuntu refers to being human in respect to creation, God and community. Ubuntu language has many possibilities when it is perceived as moving (reflective nostalgia), and not as static dogma (restorative nostalgia). Some of the possibilities when ubuntu language is seen in this perspective are: generating vitality in individuals and society; forming identity; emitting solidarity and humanity; widening communities; instigating individual responsibility; and in the context of this study, conversing with Christian language.

In the history of South Africa, which includes the history of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad, the possibilities of ubuntu language have been neglected many times, but its resilience continuously came to the fore. In the next chapter, I discuss this history.

Chapter 5

The Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in the context of apartheid South Africa

In this chapter, I describe the wider historical context in which the experience of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad is embedded. The history of the DRC and URCSA is closely linked to that of the larger South African community. In this context, negative discourses dominated the discourse of ubuntu language.

The relationship between the DRC and URCSA has been one of separation since 1857. Because of the political landscape of the day, and a changing relationship between white, black and coloured congregants, the question was presented at the 1857 synod about separate communion services for the different race groups. After a long debate, a compromise decision was reached that, as a result of the weakness of some members, Christian privileges could be enjoyed in separate buildings. This decision would have an effect on members of the separate churches for a very long time (Adonis 2002: 42; Meiring 2004:119; 120). The separate services led to separate synods and then to separate denominations along racial lines (Meiring 2004:119; 120). Regrettably, separation within the ranks of the DRC and URCSA impeded the possibilities of ubuntu language. As was the case within the South African community at large, the history of the two churches often demonstrated prejudice and distrust. In the past, voices of protest against the separation were voiced in both churches as well.

In exploring the role that the DRC played in apartheid, I look at the pain of apartheid, at voices of protest, at the turning points in the relationship between the churches, as well as the challenges of a new era and the present relationship between the DRC and URCSA.

5.1 The role of the DRC since 1948

The idea of separate development for different ethnic groups in South Africa stems from a modernist, colonial perception of a world in which absolute truths are decisive of how a person or a group of people is looked upon. Contrary to ubuntu understanding of identity (“I am because you are”), the colour of one’s skin determined if you were an intelligible human being. It meant that: “I think in a Western way, therefore I am.”

In South Africa, apartheid started with two prominent discourses from the side of white people, especially from the Afrikaner community: firstly, it was thought that upholding separate identities was important for the survival of the superior Western civilisation in the country. Secondly, the Afrikaans Christian culture thought of itself as the guardian and educator of other cultures (Bosch 1987:160).

Upholding these beliefs, the National Party came to power in a exclusively white election in 1948, promising that it would implement apartheid and a policy of separate development (Paul 2009:10). The ubuntu culture of widening community started to erode as partitionist structures were erected. The apartheid system caused amongst other evils the social dislocation of people, the fragmentation of once cohesive communities, substandard education, a widening gap between rich and poor, and unemployment mostly among black people (De Gruchy 1987:192).

With the support of the DRC the National Party promptly passed a series of laws, expanding its control over all aspects of people’s lives (Hulley 1993:75). These laws were in accordance with a modernist discourse of perceiving the world as existing in well-ordered sections. The *Population Registration Act* aimed to give everyone a permanent racial classification. One’s racial classification then determined where one’s life was to be lived, which schools

one's children should attend, which sports clubs one could join, which hospitals one could be treated at, and even where one could be buried (Paul 2009:10). The *Pass Law Act* determined where one could travel, live and work: Black people had to carry identity documents, or passes, at all times - no black persons could pass through white urban and rural areas without permits. This caused conflict with the police, because it was a criminal offence not to be in the possession of a pass (Paul 2009:36).

The DRC sanctioned apartheid as an ideology through a positivist theology in which the Bible was utilised to prove certain "general truths" about the order of God's creation. Theologians such as E P Groenewald established biblical "evidence" for apartheid: he said that according to the Bible, God called nations into existence - each with its own language and history, and that in the history of Israel one could see that God rewarded people who respected apartheid (Loubser 1987:60; 66). In 1990, when the DRC eventually came to the point of repudiating apartheid, it confessed that for too long the church "made the error of allowing forced separation and division of peoples in its own circle to be considered a biblical imperative" (*Church and Society* 1990:39).

The DRC's theological justification for apartheid contributed to discourses of racism and cultural hegemony. One of the most damaging aspects of such discourses is the identification of colour with intellectual superiority or inferiority, which had a damaging effect on people of colour's self-esteem (Ramphela 2008:76). It also gave white people a false sense of pre-eminence. The church believed the state had a biblical mandate to implement apartheid and many members of the DRC believed themselves to be chosen by God to rule society (Paul 2009:35).

The DRC often encouraged the National Party government to promulgate additional apartheid laws for example the *Immorality Act*, which determined

whom people could marry and have intercourse with, and the *Group Areas Act* which defined residential rights in terms of race in order to deter interracial relations (Hulley 1993:76). Errol Haarhoff¹³ (2011:184; 194) writes about the emergence of an “apartheid city” - white towns and black townships were designed in a way that spoke of a modernist determinism that sought technical solutions to social issues. White people had all the benefit in area placement and layout.

As resistance to apartheid policies grew, the National government sought to control or eradicate resistance by passing the *Suppression of Communism Act* in 1950. This law was refined over the years and gave arbitrary powers to the state to ban publications, organisations and persons, or place restrictions on them (Hulley 1993:76). The government also reacted forcefully and violently against the activities of resistance movements, resulting in a militarised state (De Gruchy 1987:193).

During the apartheid years, the DRC was deeply involved in missionary work. Numerous mission stations were founded, but the church’s message to the new believers from the African community was also tainted by its views on apartheid. Thias Kgathla, moderator of the URCSA General Synod, describes the theology of the DRC in dealing with believers from the black community as a “theology which was above the context that resulted in a pious and passive religion that told the poor and the oppressed to accept political decisions and authority without question, and to obey those in power for the sake of the peace of the nation. Christianity’s role was only to prepare people’s souls for the life to come” (Kgathla 1994:204).

¹³ Errol Haarhoff is part of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Auckland, New Zealand

5.2 Voices of protest - Cottesloe, December 1960

In March 1960 at Sharpeville, the South African police fired at a demonstrating crowd, killing 69 black people and leaving 187 wounded (Gous 1993:254). A group of black people, frustrated with the humiliating pass system, staged a peaceful protest. They insisted on handing in their passes, and they were prepared to get arrested for that. In doing this, they wanted to point out the statutory discrimination against black people. In the scuffle that ensued, the police started to shoot at the protesters (Pieterse 1997:8).

The Sharpeville massacre marked a turning point in the political and ecclesiastic history of struggle in South Africa. The massacre increased tensions between the English-speaking churches and the DRC. Against the worldwide reaction at the massacre, the World Council of Churches (WCC) called its member churches in South Africa to a consultation at Cottesloe, Johannesburg, in December 1960 (Gous 1993:254; Van der Watt 1987:104-118; Loubser 1987:87).

The representatives of the WCC and the eight South African member churches, including two Dutch Reformed churches (The Dutch Reformed synods of the Cape Province and the Transvaal), concluded that apartheid could not be reconciled with the teachings of Scripture. The Cottesloe decisions caused uproar in the country, especially in the Afrikaner community. The Cottesloe decisions revolved around three issues:

1. The request for political rights for people of colour.
2. The consensus that there is no biblical foundation for the prohibition of racially mixed marriages.
3. The conviction that no one may be excluded from any church because of race and colour (Gous 1993:255; Gous & Crafford 1993:206-207).

Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, the then prime minister, immediately realised that the Cottesloe decisions, which the DRC delegates supported, pulled the theological basis for the National Party's policy of apartheid from under their feet. In his 1961 New Year's message, he dismissed the decisions as the opinion of mere individuals. The DRC delegates were reprimanded by Verwoerd for allowing themselves to be manipulated by the WCC. This paved the way for the DRC synods of Transvaal and the Cape Province to reject the Cottesloe decisions in 1961, and to resign from the WCC and from the South African Council of Churches (Gous 1993:255; Pieterse 1997:11). It led to an ecclesiastic and theological isolation from the rest of the world for the DRC (Pieterse 1997:11).

The DRC maintained its position on apartheid, which in turn enabled the government to maintain its apartheid laws. This caused political and economic havoc in the country. Had the DRC maintained the theologically sound Cottesloe decisions, the government would not have been able to continue on the path of apartheid. Afrikaners would probably have come to their senses much earlier (Pieterse 1997:10).

5.2.1 The period after Cottesloe

From the late 1960's, a contextual liberation theology deepened the spiritual dimension of resistance politics in South Africa. The Black Consciousness Movement resulted in Black Theology, which amongst others, influenced a radical student movement. Trevor Huddleston's work amongst people in Sophiatown inspired the solidarity and humanity aspect of ubuntu language in theologians like Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naudé (then a DRC minister). Their ministries displayed the prophetic stance of siding with the oppressed (Ramphela 2008:19).

The vacuum after Cottesloe was filled by the Christian Institute (CI), which was founded by Beyers Naudé with financial help from the WCC. Beyers Naudé, who would not be forced back into the restrictive mould of Dutch Reformed thinking of that time, sought to keep the spirit of Cottesloe alive within the South African Christian community (Gous 1993:256; Strauss 1990:358-369). The DRC was, from the start, highly critical of the CI and its views on ecumenical issues, on justice, and especially on the need for a theology of liberation in South Africa. In 1977, the doors of the CI and the editorial office of *Pro Veritate* (the CI's official mouth piece) were permanently closed by a banning order by the government (Gaum 1997:22; Strauss 1990:358-369).

After Cottesloe, the DRC proceeded with a study on race relations in South Africa. In 1974, the General Synod of the DRC accepted a policy document, *Ras, Volk en Nasie in die lig van die Skrif (Human Relations in the light of Scripture)*. In this document, the concept of neighbourly love played an important role, but the racial discourse of apartheid was still strongly advocated and justified with a biblical argument (Gaum 1997:24; Gous & Crafford 1993:401).

In 1974, the South African Department of Information approached the leadership of the DRC to assist in the struggle against the WCC. Money was made available to establish an ecumenical office in the church, not only to promulgate the DRC's views to the wider ecumenical world, but also to enable the government to formulate arguments against the stream of negative propaganda that went out from the WCC against South Africa. Only a few members of the church's executive council knew about the project, and they were increasingly uncomfortable with it. When it became public, the executive council stated it was an error of judgement on their part, and that the church should be wary of the danger of crossing the boundary between state and church (Gaum 1997:26; 27).

From the late 1970's the political conflict in South Africa became unmanageable. One protest action followed upon the other, making it difficult for the apartheid government to retain control (Botha 2011:312). In 1976, black students of Soweto revolted against the apartheid education that was forced upon them (Kgatla 1994:206). Ramphela (2008:81) argues that this was the beginning of the end of apartheid. Women's groups with their strong sense of ubuntu language as community, civic associations, and religious groups inspired by a prophetic theology joined in. When this happened, the white power establishment used everything in its power to quell the insurrection. Consequently, on June 16th 1976 - a very sad day in the history of South Africa - many black youths in Soweto lost their lives in the struggle against apartheid. The white community reacted with shock. The National Party government reaffirmed its commitment to crush the movement, if necessary by using force - in the firm knowledge that the white business community as well as the Afrikaans churches were rallied behind them (Kgatla 1994:206).

5.2.2 Critical voices from within the DRC Family

At the end of the 1970s, many voices tried to persuade the DRC to turn around and repudiate apartheid. These voices came especially from the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (the daughter church of the DRC for coloured people).

In the meantime, voices from within the DRC spoke out as well. In 1980, the *Hervormingsdag-getuienis (the Reformation day witness)* was published by a number of professors of theology, teaching at the DRC's theological faculties at Stellenbosch and Pretoria. In this document, the DRC was encouraged to renounce racism in the church. In the following year (1981), twenty-four theologians and DRC pastors critical of apartheid published a book called *Storm-Kompas (Storm Compass)*. The forty-four statements on the role of the

DRC in the South African context captured in the book, unleashed a very uncomfortable storm in the DRC. In 1982, another document was published - the *Open Letter to the Dutch Reformed Church*. One hundred and twenty-three people signed this document, which called the church to review its stance on apartheid and to enter into a reunification process with the black churches in the DRC family. Negative as well as positive reactions on the *Open Letter* came from within the ranks of the DRC (Gaum 1997:32; Gous & Crafford 1993:366).

In 1982, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (later to unite with the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa to form URCSA) adopted the *Belhar Confession* (see addendum 3) as one of their official confessions of faith (Gous 1993:256; Loubser 1987:148). The Belhar Confession adopted a prophetic stance and was accompanied by a letter, which stated that, in moments of the life of the church when the heart of the Gospel is threatened, the church has to confess its faith anew. It was made clear that the confession did not wish to serve any group interests, and was not aimed at a specific group of people, but against a false doctrine. It was not intending to be accusatory, but a pleading confession for a new beginning, reconciliation and justice (Botha & Naudé 1998:41-46). The Belhar Confession rests upon five convictions:

1. the belief in the one triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
2. that church unity is a gift and an obligation;
3. that any doctrine which absolutises natural diversity, and which leads to forced separation on the grounds of race and colour is rejected;
4. that in a world full of injustice and enmity, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, poor and wronged, and the church must follow by taking a stand against injustice, and by walking with the marginalised;
5. that the church is called to confess and take action, even if it means persecution by authorities (Botha & Naudé 1998:1-5).

The initial reaction from the DRC was negative, sometimes highly critical. Belhar was regarded as an inappropriate document at the wrong time and an unwelcome attack on the church (Horn 2011: 264). The DRC was especially uncomfortable with the statement in the confession: that “God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” (Loubser 1987:149). The DRC argued that this statement was susceptible to serious misunderstanding (Loubser 1987:149). For most of the DRC congregants, an unqualified condemnation of the South African *status quo*, as embodied in the Belhar Confession, was unacceptable (Loubser 1987:150). However, small shifts started to occur in the church’s thinking about race and racism.

A significant shift occurred in 1986 when the general synod of the DRC recommended that the guidelines in the Belhar Confession would be used in future discussions with the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. A new policy statement *Church and Society (Kerk en Samelewing)*, was adopted in 1990. It became clear the DRC was setting on a new course, away from its apartheid past. The document stated, *inter alia*:

While the Dutch Reformed Church over the years seriously and persistently sought the will of God and his word for our society, the church made the error of allowing forced separation and division of peoples in its own circle, to be considered a biblical imperative. The Dutch Reformed Church should have distanced itself much earlier from this view and admits and confesses its neglect (par 283)

Apartheid began to function in such a way that the largest part of the population of the country experienced it as an oppressive system, which through the forced separation of peoples was in reality favouring one group wrongfully above the others. In this way, the human dignity of one’s fellowman became adversely affected and was in conflict with the principles of love and righteousness (par284)

Any system which in practice functions in this way, is unacceptable in the light of Scripture and the Christian conscience and must be rejected as sinful (par 285)

Church and Society 1990: 39; 40.

5.2.3 Rustenburg - November 1990

In the town Rustenburg, in November 1990, a large number of senior church leaders came together in the spirit of a second Cottesloe. The theme was appropriately chosen: "Towards a united Christian witness in a changing South Africa." At this conference, there was a declaration by all the churches, rejecting apartheid as a sin (Gous 1993:258; Gous & Crafford 1993:207). Prof Willie Jonker of the DRC made a confession in which he repented of the church's involvement with apartheid. In Jonker's words (1998:204):

I confess before you and before the Lord, not only my own sin and guilt, and my personal responsibility for the political, social, economic and structural wrongs that have been done to many of you, and the result of which you and our whole country is still suffering from, but vicariously I dare also to do that in the name of the DRC of which I am a member, and for the Afrikaner people as a whole. I have the liberty to do just that, because the DRC at its latest synod has declared apartheid a sin and confessed its own guilt of negligence in not warning against it and distancing itself from it long ago.

This was considered a step in the right direction, but just before the closing of the conference, Prof Potgieter, the leader of the DRC's delegation, publicly qualified the DRC's support for only some portions of the declaration that were decided upon at the conference (Gous 1993:661). It remained difficult for many in the DRC to come to a prophetic, contextual understanding of theology.

5.3 After 1994 - a new era

During the time immediately after South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, there was an almost euphoric, peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy. This can to a large extent be ascribed to the ubuntu attitude of solidarity and humanity prevalent in the community (Du Toit 2004:456).

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was established to accompany South Africans on the way to healing and nation building, utilised the narrative-as-identity aspect of ubuntu language in which personal identity is shaped by the life stories of the people in the community (Du Toit 2004:456). This is also congruent with a social construction discourse, in which meaning is constructed in community. It created space for the deconstruction of the dominant Afrikaner-apartheid discourse, as multiple subjugated narratives started to emerge (Paul 2009:12). Through the stories of ordinary people, the effect of apartheid was made clear. Victims, perpetrators, and those who thought they were just innocent bystanders, now realised their complicity, and had an opportunity to participate in each other's humanity in story form. Botman (1996:37) wrote about the importance of this space that the TRC provided:

Each person and each community has its own history of life that is embedded in a framework of stories or narratives, which in turn is nourished by wider stories from the social and cultural context and also by the grand stories of confession, forgiveness, reconciliation and truth.

In a certain sense, the TRC activated a "self-otherness" (Heshusius 1994:17), which is consistent with the ubuntu notion of "a person is a person through other persons". A self-otherness results from the ability to temporarily let go of all preoccupation with self and move into a state of complete attention to others. Heshusius (1994:16) says that self-otherness actually refers to a mode

of consciousness, a way of being in the world, which is characterised by “allocentric” knowing. Allocentric knowing requires a radical turning towards the other.

5.3.1 The DRC’s submission to the TRC

The TRC's first focus was on the emotional damage and unresolved turmoil of thought and feeling of the victims of apartheid. However, the overarching goal was a change in the belief- and value systems that permitted torture, atrocities and human rights violations (Dowdall 1996:27). Many people, especially those in control during the apartheid regime - the *Broederbond*, Afrikaner culture, the schools of Christian National education, and the church - were called out from behind their curtains (Botman 1996:38).

The TRC challenged the churches, as well as the other faith communities in South Africa to testify about the role they had played in apartheid. It invited the DRC to testify on its role in introducing apartheid into church structures and establishing separate churches for members classified under apartheid as black people, Indian, and Coloured (Tutu 1999:224).

Several individuals from the DRC testified before the TRC about the church's role in apartheid. One such person was Nico Smith, a former DRC minister who was himself an outspoken critic of apartheid. Nico Smith testified that the complicity of the DRC in the policy of apartheid went beyond simple approval and legitimisation. He said many apartheid state operatives and executioners were members of the DRC, who found positive support for their actions from the church (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Volume 4, 1998:66). From the side of the military chaplaincy, Prof Dirk Human of the DRC testified in a separate submission that a number of national service chaplains became very critical of the chaplaincy's ideological support for the war in Angola (*die Bosoorlog*) and the close co-operation between church and state. This, however, brought them into conflict with the higher echelons in the

Chaplain General's office (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Volume 4, 1998:72).

While individual DRC members were positive about the work of the TRC, many remained concerned about the fairness of the TRC. In the leadership of the church, as well, there were a number who were skeptical about the TRC's efforts to convince white South Africans that the process would not degenerate into a witch-hunt (Meiring 1999:61). In the end, the moderamen of the church did agree to make a submission to the TRC. In his submission, Rev Freek Swanepoel, the moderator of the DRC stated that not everybody in the church was happy that he was testifying - he could therefore not declare that he was speaking on behalf of the entire DRC. Swanepoel admitted the church's mistakes, and unconditionally asked for forgiveness. He said that there had been a time when the church spoke authoritatively in society - but now, that time was over. He stated that the church had learnt that it would have to act as a servant, following in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus (Meiring 1999:278).

5.4 After the TRC - new challenges

In the years after the initial euphoria of a new South Africa, vast changes have occurred in the structures, institutional arrangements, policies, modes of operation and relationships within society. However, a reorientation from past practices - defined by racism, inequality and the lack of human rights - towards our present constitution continues to be an enormous challenge (Ramphela 2008:13).

One of these challenges is the gap between rich and poor that stems from the serious imbalance in economic and social apartheid structures (Maluleke

1998:327; Nürnberger 1994:124). Seekings & Natrass (2005:69) describes the imbalance as follows:

Because of unemployment and the lack of smallholder agriculture, the classes in the middle of the social structure were actually working classes, and the so-called middle classes were a very privileged elite. A majority of core working class households were actually the richer half of the population, and most intermediate class households had incomes above the mean.

Remarkably (although not without its difficulties), black and white South Africans are generally learning to live and work together (Ramphela 2008:14). For white people this does not come automatically: the system in South Africa was that of an affluent white world and a separate poor black world. Black South Africans daily crossed the boundary between the two to earn their income, so they had some knowledge of the white world. White South Africans, on the other hand, had no reason to cross the boundary, and continued to be ignorant of the black world (Saayman 2007:96). According to David Bosch (1991:147), after more than forty years of apartheid, “white people in South Africa knew more about Europe and North America than life in a black township”.

5.4.1 Different experiences and different challenges

In South African society, people are experiencing the new era in different ways. This causes complex challenges on many levels, and it is the context in which the DRC and URCSA need to identify their role in the community, also in the community of Ohrigstad.

Anthony Balcomb (1998:56) describes the attitudes of different groups of people, as they see themselves in South Africa¹⁴: The **new political and economic elite**, for whom posh cars, posh houses, and posh salaries are replacing the ubuntu notion of caring, sharing and accountability. Some key church leaders, who were part of the liberation struggle, are part of this new elite (Balcomb 1998:56). According to Ramphela (2008:117), numerous new elites have embraced the bureaucratic culture they inherited from apartheid. Instead of the ubuntu saying of “I am because we are”, there is the notion of “I am what I have” (Eze 2011:305). For this group, it is crucial to hold on to their new power positions and money, because, in Eze’s words: “A threat to my access to economic resource is a threat to my potentiality as a human being.” This idea of identity naturally influences society as a whole - including the many people who do not have the resources. Neglecting the needs of the poor also becomes prevalent. Naudé (2011:503) says it seems as if ubuntu language has disappeared in this group, “for the hunger for success is blinding them to the weak and vulnerable, the old, those dying of AIDS who are socially shunned and foreigners who are attacked. Instead of spending more money on education and basic health care, sports stadiums and airports are built for the ruling elite and the rich” (Naudé 2011:503).

This is in conflict with the nature of ubuntu language, as Sam from URCSA makes clear:

There is a clash. With ubuntu, we appreciate it when somebody has good things. We share - what we have is for us all. We know one of these days, you are going to help me with this car of yours... Things are changing. Maybe in a capitalist world people became selfish. It is a clash between ubuntu and the capitalist theory. People only care for themselves. They will think: “When I have something, I have it in order

¹⁴ In mentioning these groups, I am aware that one cannot put people’s experiences in neat sections, as in modernist thinking. One person can also feel different things at different times.

for other people to worship me; I want to be somebody big. That is against ubuntu. Ubuntu and that way of thinking repel each other.

The **previously privileged who longs for the past** are according to Balcomb, against everything that involves a new, democratic South Africa. He argues that:

You will find those for whom everything has gone wrong. The country, in their opinion, is falling apart. Standards are dropping, crime is increasing, and the “barbarians” are at the door, trying to break it down... These are those who were previously the privileged, those who, by virtue of the colour of their skin, were able to access the best of everything that the society could offer without any threat from those who were of a different skin colour Balcomb 1998:58.

A number of DRC members find themselves in this group. Ramphela (2008:17) states that, because it is difficult for some white people to accept that they now have to cooperate, live with, and compete with black people as equals, they resist contributing to society. Many still insist on the theoretical “advantages” of apartheid (Balcomb 1998:57). Ramphela (2008:73) notes that this standpoint of white superiority has become something that is difficult to change, because people grew up in an environment that rendered them higher status by virtue of their skin colour. Their conduct towards black people still demonstrates this, as a participant of this research in Ohrigstad states:

In town, some black people are still ill-treated when they work in white people’s houses. They are not treated as persons. That makes you feel like a thing. But you must keep on working, since people are suffering because of unemployment.

Then there is, according to Balcomb (1998:58) the **marginalised who accept their circumstances**. They are those for whom very little has changed. While

expectations have been raised, they have not been met, and their economic situation remains the same. All they can do is to continue to put in an honest day's work, and hope that their union (if they belong to one) will be able to improve their lot. Either that or they must get on with things, not expecting the goods to be delivered (Balcomb 1998:58). Many of them stay in marginalised rural settlements, which still reflect contours from the past - lacking proper tarred roads, water and sanitation (Ramphela 2008:79). Most members of URCSA in Ohrigstad find themselves in this group.

A culture of numbness is settling over these people - they have difficulty in taking control of their situation. In the past, in accordance with ubuntu language of vitalising communities, self-reliance systems were initialised. However, a consequence of the quest for control by the new government is the demobilisation of such systems, and the creation of a paralysing dependency culture (Ramphela 2008:119).

Enid, a research participant and primary school teacher in a village of Ohrigstad makes it clear:

At Ohrigstad Primary School (a multi-cultural primary school in town) where I taught for five years, it is different from the village. There is a big difference between the schools. Maybe it is because in town they pay school fees. They sell stuff for fundraising. We must introduce that to the village schools, but the teachers will not do that. Sometimes it is laziness. They will not work overtime. You must be there for the children, and the parents are not involved. Only three will come to a parent meeting. It is a syndrome. Maybe because if I pay, I want to hear and see what is going on? Getting things for free makes us... we must teach people how to do things instead of just receiving. In the past, they did the things on their own to survive in apartheid. Why are we folding our arms now? In the village, there is no water, but in town

where mostly white people live, there is. It makes me feel marginalised; it makes me think it is because we are blacks. But the people in government are also struggling. We have a saying: - *Kgomo go tsoswa yeo e itsosang* - "if you do not lift yourself up, who will?" You cannot sit like this. People expect free, free, free - Mandela promised free education, housing etc.

There are also the **marginalised who are frustrated and angry** at the fact that they are clearly being left behind. Many have decided to join the growing masses of the disinherited who are sometimes making their living through crime (Balcomb 1998:57). This is also true of the villages in Ohrigstad. For Enid, this is worrying:

If children grow up like this - we will kill each other: I have bread, you break in and steal. We must teach the new generation. They think if I plant seed, tomorrow I will have food. I think the internet teaches that. They must know there are steps. After matric, many people sit at home with a matric certificate and no work.

Hankela (2012:61) explains that for many people it is as if markets had taken the role that policies used to in safeguarding white privilege, because distribution of wealth largely remained the same. Many people still feel themselves and their culture to be second-rate to white people.

One can understand this, regarding the degrading climate of apartheid, which prevailed for many generations. A research participant in Ohrigstad gives a harrowing account of the trauma and humiliation of the past:

Very few white people still upholds apartheid. The majority understand black people. It is better now. When I walk on a farm road now, I am not scared. In the past, they were ill-treating people. They used sjamboks when I was little. They attacked the black people who walked past.

Ramphela (2008:73) argues that such inferiority is deeply rooted into one's psyche because of doors of opportunity continuously being shut. It results in repeated humiliation. This makes it hard for one to rise to the challenges of taking responsibility. It sometimes results in aggression, self-hatred and jealousy of those perceived as being financially successful. On the one hand, a defensive romanticism of traditional culture arises, but on the other, the notion of ubuntu language as community and solidarity becomes non-existent in that each person is fighting for him/herself (Ramphela 2008:16).

A group that I would like to add to Balcomb's, is **those who are trying to make this country work**. This group consists of black and white people - people who were previously part of the struggle, and those who previously supported apartheid. They truly want to contribute to the healing of South Africa in living the possibilities of ubuntu language. Sometimes, it seems that this group is overwhelmed by the immenseness of the challenges that are facing them. Nevertheless, they try. The majority of participants of this research in Ohrigstad, can be counted with this group. Enid says the following:

In the school where I teach now, in one class, I have 76 children, with no facilities. We have very old desks and only very old chalkboards. Why don't we change? I am pushing - now there are two more women teaching with us. I do not give up. My character lets me keep on. If I want something, I will keep on trying.

Janet, another participant, stays with her parents (her mother is deaf). She has no income, only child support. She has one child. Janet does voluntary work on a project with orphans at the community centre. They are five women who cook, help with homework and facilitate support groups in the afternoons:

We have challenges with the vulnerable children. We learn to make plans with birth certificates and grants. Some stay with their families who are not working, without any food. The children tell us about that. We take the food leftovers to the parents. There are also orphans at the project. I feel I make a difference. Once we even solved a rape case.

Members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad find themselves, as South Africans, in the different above-mentioned groups, and they are experiencing the effects and challenges thereof.

5.5 The reunification process in the DRC Family

During the last few years, a large percentage of DRC congregants openly acknowledged their racist past, dealt with it, and consider themselves part of the new South Africa (Saayman 2007:133). On the other hand, it sometimes seems that some DRC members do not understand at all the racist essence of apartheid and what it did to all South Africans (Saayman 2007:135).

The DRC and URCSA are still two separate churches. Countless discussions have been conducted between the churches at local and at synodical level. A unified diaconal service and presbyteries in the Cape, as well as joint efforts

regarding training of ministers and joint projects have been established (Botha 2011:315; 316). However, it often seems as if apartheid is still alive and well, and living in the church. It is as if the two churches cannot come to a mutual trust.

Willem Saayman, in his book *Being Missionary Being Human* (2007:134) argues that the two churches' theological discourses are still very different: URCSA's theological discourse is determined by faith as expressed in the Belhar Confession, which is strongly influenced by a liberation theology of God siding with the poor and oppressed. It is also influenced by Barth's notion that the Christian ministry has everything to do with politics (Boesak 2011:569). The DRC's theological discourse is still occasionally characterised by modernist, Kuyperian interpretations of creation ordinances, therefore it has problems accepting the Belhar Confession (Horn 2011:273), and finds it difficult to interact with the theology of URCSA. As a result, structural unity does not take place.

From URCSA's viewpoint it is essential that, for the churches to reunite, the DRC must include the Belhar Confession (see 5.2.1) into its body of confessions. This is because Belhar forms an integral part of URCSA's body of confessions, (Horn 2011:267) and accepting Belhar as a faith confession will confirm that the DRC has parted with our apartheid past finally.

At the DRC's general synod of 2011, it was decided to include the Belhar Confession in the church's body of confessions, in the way described by the Church Order. A working team, including members of URCSA, was constituted to set up a clear procedure according to the church's constitution. At the synod of 2013, the team reported that the only way to include a new confession was to amend Article 1 of the church constitution. In order for this to happen, all the regional synods, the church councils and the congregations had to vote on the acceptance of Belhar. There had to be, according to church constitution, a two third majority vote in order for the amendment to be

permissible (Agenda General Synod 2015:4). The 2013 General Synod's proposal for a changed Article 1 reads as follows:

- 1 The DRC is grounded in the Bible as holy Word of God.
- 2.1 The doctrine which the church, in congruence with the Word of God, confesses to, is expressed in
 - 2.1.1 the ecumenical confessions, namely the Apostolical Creed, the Creed of Nicea, the Creed of Athanasius; and
 - 2.1.2 the Three Formulations of Unity, namely the Dutch Confession, the Heidelberg Instructions, and the Dordt Teachings.
- 2.2 The Confession of Belhar is part of the body of confessions of the church, in a way that there is room for congregants, ministers and councils who find the confession congruent with the Word of God; as well as for congregants, ministers and councils who do not underwrite it as a confession.
- 3 The church acknowledges her calling to confess her faith as permanently binding, and that an expansion of her body of confessions must take place without forcing anyone

Agenda, General Synod 2015:5.

This proposal was accepted by the DRC General Synod. In DRC ranks it was regarded as a breakthrough. In a conversation with Dr Colin Goeiman, member of URCSA's executive committee, it however became clear that there was unhappiness amongst URCSA's ranks about the proposal. According to them, the proposal was a watered down version of the original proposal that the working committee prepared for synod.

During this time two letters concerning Belhar, written by two leaders within the DRC congregation Orighstad, were published in *Die Kerkbode* (the DRC's official newspaper). The first letter was from Rev Anton Doyer (see Chapter Six), the then minister of the DRC in Ohrigstad. The second letter was from General Constand Viljoen (see also Chapter Six), former Chief of Staff in the

South African Defence Force and church council member of the DRC
Ohrigstad.

Anton Doyer writes in the *Kerkbode* of March 7, 2014:

Two incidents of national consequence again stress the continuous relevance of the 27 year old Belhar Confession:

The first is the recent passing of former president Mandela. In the intense reflection that followed, we again became aware of his irreplaceable contribution to the future of our country and its people. In awe we looked and listened to the greatness of his vision, and the practical implications thereof on all levels of society. His precious and timeless inheritance can be summarised in three words: reconciliation, unity and justice - 'by chance' also the content of the Belhar Confession.

The second, is the coming election on May 7. In the run-up towards it there will naturally be much talk, argumentation, propaganda and promises from every political angle. Government and economic strategy will be analysed and compared, and the more thoroughly the better - an informed voting community is the most significant aspect of a working democracy.

But after all is said and done, we need to embrace the faith positioning and the values of Belhar. It directs the socio-political discourse, and it forms a permanent foundation for our peaceful co-existence.

Therefore I am deeply grateful for the General Synod's acceptance of the Belhar Confession and the incorporation thereof in our body of confessions. My sincere prayer is that each congregation in the Dutch Reformed family will embrace it as a precious gift, which the Lord bestowed upon his church for our time and circumstance.

The above letter recognises the ubuntu possibilities of harmony and widening community that underlies the theology of the Belhar Confession. It also shows the prophetic role that the DRC and URCSA can play in attaining peace, reconciliation, unity and justice in society.

The second letter in reaction to the former, was from General Constand Viljoen in the *Kerkbode* of May 2, 2014:

In the *Kerkbode* of March 7, there was a letter from a church minister in which he proclaimed the hope that the whole DRC will accept the Belhar Confession.

According to the decisions of the recent General Synod, it is clear that the delegates firstly admitted that there were two strong groups, which existed for many years (for and against Belhar as confession in the DRC). Secondly, that after years of differences, the approach will now be to make room for both opinions. The General Synod thus reached consensus that we are going to serve God in unity in this manner. This can prevent the splitting of the DRC. Naturally this formulae will need great wisdom.

To now let the old dispute continue through letters and propaganda, only creates further animosity and uncertainties with our congregants. We must take hands now and assist the leaders of the church in this regard, because they have a huge task. If they do not succeed, the dispute of the past will continue to handicap God's work. It will dilute our attention - away from our primary task.

If the process is successful, then the DRC will be able to serenely continue its God given task, and it will be able to play its part in the new South Africa with dignity.

This difficult process asks everyone's prayers, and for all of us to stop squabbling. Let us focus on the difficult resolve of the General Synod, and accept that this attempt will ask much innovative thinking.

The above letter is expressive of the views among some leaders within the DRC, as well as many congregants, about their understanding of the Christian message: to calmly prepare people's souls for the afterlife, with little regard to the context they live in. The ubuntu possibilities that the Afrikaner culture can be capable of displaying, are in this sense again narrowed to the one specific group.

After a period of preparation, the congregants, the church councils and the regional synods of the DRC voted on Article 1. Unfortunately, the outcome was negative. Only three out of ten regional synods could attain a two-third majority vote in favour. More than two-thirds of the church councils voted against the amendment. Only 17.2% of DRC congregants took part in voting, and out of them only 3.7% voted for the amendment (Agenda: General Synod 2015:6). As the DRC of Ohrigstad is part of the Eastern regional synod, I

provide this synod's outcome (as in the agenda of the General Synod 2015:35):

Eastern synod

Congregations partaking: 85 Congregations in synod: 85

Region	Church council's recommendation to congregation				Congregation's results - two thirds				Church council's final decision on Art 1			
	yes		no		yes		no		yes		no	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Small rural	10	11.8	22	25.9	8	9.6	23	27.7	8	9.4	24	28.2
Rural	7	8.2	10	11.8	7	8.4	10	12.0	7	8.2	10	11.8
Large town	9	10.6	6	7.1	5	6.0	10	12.0	6	7.1	9	10.6
Urban	19	22.4	2	2.4	14	16.9	6	7.2	14	16.5	7	8.2
Total	45	52.9	40	47.1	34	41.0	49	59.0	35	41.2	50	58.8

Although the delegates at the Eastern synod voted with more than two third votes for the amendment, it is clear that the many church councils and congregants within the synod were against the new Article 1. In the end, the Eastern synod executive committee's reaction towards the process was: "The Belhar book in the Eastern synod is now closed and will not be opened again. It creates tension in the congregations, therefore we gave the assurance to the congregations that we vote once, and then we are done. We must accept that the Belhar Confession will, for the most congregants of the Eastern synod, never be a confession" (Agenda: General Synod 2015:15).

The General Synod of 2015 (Agenda: General Synod 2015:7-13) published a reflection on this project, in which congregants, church councils and regional

synods gave their opinion. It is interesting to read the different reflections on why the process failed.

Some of the reflections show that there are DRC members who embrace the prophetic values of Belhar, but regard the process as problematic:

- The idea of a compromise statement (effectively allowing congregants to vote either for or against Belhar) is confusing – it complicates the process.
- Many church members are positive about Belhar, but they wanted a stronger, more positive statement, committing the DRC to accept Belhar.
- There should have been more direct communication with congregants and church councils.
- Younger congregants find dogmatic instructions irrelevant, and they are apathetic towards “church politics”. Therefore, the most votes came from conservative people above the age of 55.
- A number of congregants believe the process to be 20 years too late - the church must just move forward now. Church unity must just happen, even if it is on ground level.
- For the past thirty years, the church failed to live and proclaim the contents of the Belhar Confession, and now we expect congregants to vote on the issue.
- Congregants do not understand the role of creeds and confessions in the church.
- The guidelines of the Church Order which stipulates that congregations and church councils must vote about creeds and confessions, is very problematic and must be altered.

There are also reflections that show the unwillingness of DRC members to open up to the ubuntu possibilities of a more just identity, a widening of community, solidarity and responsibility:

- Ministers of financially and emotionally weak DRC congregations believed it would be fatal for the survival of their congregations to include Behar as a faith confession.
- In rural congregations, there was a fear that the church might split.
- Congregants do not trust church leadership whom, in their view, were guilty of a propaganda campaign for a “yes” vote. The feeling was that the “top leadership” manipulated the process.
- Emotions about white people’s position in South Africa had an effect: “We are not giving our church away too” was a dominant narrative.
- Some see Belhar as a means for URCSA to force the DRC to surrender.
- For some, the Belhar Confession is nothing more than politics, and the liberation theology on which the confession was built, is wrong.
- It may be that in voting this way, some DRC members tried to distance themselves from the responsibility of reconciliation, unity and social justice.
- Many still do not understand the immense damage that apartheid has done.

Following the disappointing outcome, the General Synod decided to allow regional synods to accept their own faith confessions, as long as it does not contradict the Bible as well as existing creeds and confessions. That made it possible for the synod of Western and Southern Cape to accept the Belhar Confession as one of its creeds. Congregations, church councils and

presbyteries are also encouraged to take hands and work together with URCSA (*Kortnuus* - Eastern synod newsletter: 9 October 2015).

After all is said, we must keep in mind that this is not the only narrative. There is still the narrative of the majority of voters, countrywide, who voted in favour of the amendment of Article 1 (54.9%) Six out of ten synods did achieve a majority - albeit not a two-thirds majority (Agenda: General Synod 2015:6).

After exploring the problematic history of the DRC and URCSA in South Africa, the question remains: can ubuntu language offer a shared language in which members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad can come to a better understanding? Can ubuntu language provide a safe space where we can be honest about the past, about our misunderstandings and a future together?

In the next chapter, I explore the recent history of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad, interpreted by the stories of co-researchers in this study.

Chapter 6

Conversations with members of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in Ohrigstad: Narratives of trust and distrust

This chapter contains a comprehensive report on the Ohrigstad discussions. I focus on the question: what did the narrative conversations between members of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad, and with myself, reveal about their current history in terms of ubuntu language?

In the research conversations on the role of ubuntu language in bridging gaps, the participants' narratives contained rich histories, situated in different approaches, each reflecting their unique ubuntu language. In their narratives, the members of URCSA and the DRC interpreted the current experience of the relationship between the two churches, as well as the impact of the relationship upon their individual lives.

It is important to note the difference between the history and the narratives of people. History wants to answer the question of what took place, while narratives ask the question: "Who am I?" People's narratives revolve around memory. Jonathan Sacks (2007:116) states the following about memory and narratives: "Identity belongs not to history but to memory. It is not a matter of reading texts, learning facts, remembering dates. It is a matter of telling a certain story as our own".

I started the individual narrative conversations by asking the research participants questions such as: "How long have you been living here? Are you happy in Ohrigstad? Tell me about your life here." As I already had informed the participants about the research, they immediately reacted with stories

about their experiences of the two congregations. I also asked questions such as: “Can you think of stories of distrust that you experience in the community? What are the things that feed these stories? Can you think of stories of trust? What are the things that make trust stronger?” In our conversations, I did not directly ask about ubuntu, but as the stories were told, I witnessed ubuntu language - and sometimes the lack thereof - unfolding.

The participants’ narratives portrayed contradictory thoughts about a relationship that goes back for many years. The narratives described a recent past in which great efforts were made to bring the two congregations closer. Unfortunately, it also provided a heart-breaking account of turning away from each other, and of a deteriorating relationship. In searching for ubuntu language in these narratives, I discovered an account of solidarity between the congregants and their pastors, and a great experience of humanity between DRC and URCSA members. I also discovered a tenacious discourse of racism. The research participants’ accounts were heartfelt and sincere, touching me deeply.

6.1 A longstanding relationship

In the research conversations, it was clear that the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad always had a deep connection with one another. Although it had been a rocky road of racism, prejudice and oppression, ubuntu language of sharing and respect for each other was also experienced on the way, even in unbearable apartheid times.

Johannes is a 77-year-old participant in this research. He lives in Rietfontein, one of the villages near Ohrigstad, and is proud to have run the Comrades Marathon twice. A sense of widening community, which transcends race, is evident in his narrative: he tells the story about a white farmer who got involved with his family during the apartheid years, and who attended his father's funeral long after their working relationship ended. Johannes and the farmer still contact each other:

I am retired - I worked at an asbestos mine as a hostel manager. I worked with relationships, also between black and white people. In 1962, we were moved from the farms around Ohrigstad to the villages. I am happy in the village - I belong fully. My family stayed on a farm in Ohrigstad. I was already working on the mine when we were moved. The farmer called my father and told him about the move. He said: "I am not chasing you. If you feel you want to move, you are free to go, because I am selling the farm." So we wanted to leave, because we did not know what the new farmer would be like. The farmer came with us to the village (Rietfontein) and showed us the place where we could stay. We wanted to stay. The farmer gave transport for us - for all our property and cattle. He was a good man, a school principal. He cared for the people who worked for him. He did not like children walking around on his farm - he wanted them to go to school. When my father left the farm, he stayed at home while I worked at the mine.

After we left, there came another farmer, it was in 1974. He traced my father because my father knew everything about the farm. The farmer said he could not farm without him. He asked: "Come back to farm". Our whole family went back to the farm. The farmer did not leave the rest of us in the village. My father was the supervisor on the farm again. The farmer treated us very well. He also wanted the children to go to

school. After six years, he sold the farm as well. He asked: “Do you still want to stay here?” We said no. He took us with everything back to the village. He always phoned us to ask: “Are you well, do you have any problems?” He gave his phone number to us in case we had problems. When my father died, I phoned him. He came with his whole family to the funeral. He told me: “If you have any problems, phone me.” Even now, we still have contact. This happened at the height of apartheid, and many white farmers were not like that.

Johannes relates an instance where white farmers practised ubuntu language of solidarity and humanity by taking care of the farmworkers’ children:

I remember in the 1960’s, some of the farmers let the black children attend their mountain school on the farms, because they felt the children were not cared for properly in the mountains. They showed respect for our culture, and wanted the children to be safe.

Johannes states his sadness that the DRC and URCSA are two separate churches:

Now the relationship between the DRC and URCSA is mostly equal. But some white people feel a relationship with blacks cannot be equal. The only thing - there is a bit of friction - the thing that causes problems – the majority of people on the farms; they are *NG Kerk* (DRC). When they talk, they say: “I belong to the *NG Kerk*.” My mind says I am *NG Kerk*. We must be one church. God is one. It comes from apartheid.

Tolletjie, from the DRC congregation, remembers cooperating with URCSA members in an atmosphere of mutual respect, which goes back for years. He recalls moments in this close relationship long ago with the pastor of URCSA. In sharing their stories with each other, ubuntu language of identity and widening community took shape between them. An individual's identity is enhanced through community and the stories of the community. In Tolletjie's account, as a young man, he became more conscious of his own being, privileges and duties through listening to the stories Rev Maphoto shared about himself and his experience of apartheid. Tolletjie also depicts how their religion always bound URCSA and DRC members together:

From an early age I, being a deacon, was a member of the outreach committee. We were involved with URCSA (then DRC in Africa), with Rev Maphoto. I listened to many of his stories. During apartheid, he felt the pain thereof, and he told me about it. We had a mission project with a tent in the rural areas. The DRC in Africa lent us a tent. Rev Maphoto and I always went to fetch the tent in Bosbokrand, next to the Kruger Park. On our way there, he shared many anecdotes with me. The politicians held him in high esteem, and he was moderator of the DRC in Africa at the time. He was humble and sincere. We moved from one place to another, and then we returned the tent. Every time, this mission project was a highlight for me. We reached many people, and later on, we had a music centre and power generator. There were evangelists whom we worked with. Two years ago in Puriem (one of the Ohrigstad villages), there was a gathering and many of them attended. They came to greet me - after 20 years, they are now grey-haired as I was then. God walks a path with people. Politics and the world changed, and these people are still involved and enthusiastic. We were glad to see each other. We are people with different cultures, but the one common ground is our religion. The religious community plays a bigger part in this country than we think.

Ephraim, a member of the URCSA congregation talks about how ubuntu language of widening community started to develop when URCSA and DRC members welcomed each other in their churches, and of solidarity with the poor community when DRC congregants utilised their resources to strengthen URCSA's hands:

I have an Honours degree in educational management. I am a retired teacher. Now I am farming with my cattle and goats. Previously we were building a cordial relationship with the DRC. We were building something out of nothing. We trusted one another. We thought we were holding hands to the future together.

The previous pastor and others from the DRC could attend church with us. Sometimes he conducted the service here, and pastor Siphon preached there once. It is not a secret that whites are good at fundraising. With us, their relationship has helped us a lot, because they brought people from other countries. We established something, like building this preschool. Alone we would not have those channels.

Rev Anton, a key role player in the relationship between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad, marvels at the ubuntu language of caring and solidarity that he encountered in witnessing how Rev Maphoto mentored Rev Siphon. Anton and his congregants in the DRC learnt a lot about ubuntu language from Rev Siphon's solidarity with his suffering congregants. He describes how the URCSA congregants in Ohrigstad widened the community by receiving DRC members in their homes:

After my wife and I arrived in Ohrigstad, I made contact with the then minister of URCSA, Rev Markus Maphoto. He was in the process of

retiring and concluding his ministry in the congregation. He introduced me to the leadership (we have met on executive level years back, while working on uniting the DRC in Africa and the Dutch Reformed Mission Church to form URCSA). The image of him I will always remember is that of a caring part time minister, who lived intensely with his congregants. He empowered them to run the ministry while he went to earn his keep as synod official, because he did not want to put pressure on the congregation in terms of full responsibility for his remuneration.

During the time of his ministry, a few of us DRC congregants had the privilege to visit congregants of URCSA, in order to get to know each other personally across race and church barriers. I remember one such visit with a single mother, whom, charitably and welcoming, took us in her humble house. We became aware of her and her children's fight to survive.

It made an impression on me to see how Rev Maphoto made sure to accompany and introduce his successor, Siphso Mokoena to the ministry. We were only a few DRC congregants who attended the young Rev Siphso's inauguration in his first congregation. Naturally it was a much longer ceremony than we were used to, but we went home afterwards, deeply captivated by the well organised, dignified function (with a splendid meal), and with the quality of the new pastor's friends and family.

Rev Siphso was immediately well liked by the community. I remember from time to time he told me that he received offers from more affluent congregations, but he did not accept, because he is deeply involved

with his people, and he wants to make a difference in their lives. When he prays during church services, it sometimes happens that his prayer is interrupted because he becomes emotional about the households in desperate need; those whom he is praying for, especially households where there are only children.

From the above narratives of co-researchers, it is evident that the black and white community of Ohrigstad has experienced ubuntu language of identity, widening community and solidarity for many years.

6.2 The recent past

In the recent past, great efforts for a deeper understanding and co-operation between the local DRC and URCSA have been made. The expectation was to establish a relationship in which the possibilities of ubuntu language could strengthen a bond which already existed. These possibilities were: discovering a new identity in which white and black people could become conscious of their worth through recognising each other; establishing a humane, caring relationship of solidarity between people in the two communities; finding energy and inspiration in community with each other which could vitalise the two congregations; widening the church community by including each other and ultimately becoming one congregation; taking responsibility together for the problems in society and to practise neighbourly love and care for the marginalised that Jesus Christ propagated.

Because a great deal of the above already existed, the DRC synod asked if URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad would become a pilot project for church unity in rural areas. A *Joint Witness Forum* was created by the two churches

to develop a relationship of trust and co-operation in local projects, hopefully leading towards the unification of the two congregations. In March 2006, they organised a weekend discussion, which was attended by representatives of both churches. From the DRC side, the representatives were mostly farmers, and from URCSA's side, Rev Siphon and two members who were farm labourers from the village, attended. Prof Julian Müller, a narrative researcher from the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria, was invited to facilitate the discussions. I attended the workshop as an observer. Müller had a very positive experience of the meeting. In his reflections¹⁵, he mentioned a number of things:

- There was an existing relationship of mutual trust between the two pastors (Siphon and Anton), and the discussions exhibited openness and friendliness.
- This openness was, according to the DRC participants, not representative of the majority in the white church. From URCSA's side, the participants claimed that this was representative of their congregation.
- Maybe a bit inappropriately for such a group discussion, the DRC participants described the harsh racism among their peers. The black people did not seem shocked. Some of the white participants tried to soften it by saying that things were changing, and Rev Anton argued that in the faith community it was different.
- There were different responses to Prof Müller's question: "What keeps us apart and restrain us in making progress towards church unity?" The DRC participants' opinion was that people did not need further unity - it disturbed their comfort zones. White people also feared losing control, and there were political issues such as land reforms that were used as arguments against unity. The URCSA

¹⁵ See addendum 4 for Prof Müller's full reflection.

participants emphasised the low self-esteem of black people. They did not see themselves as equal to the privileged white community. The hardships of black people in the villages demotivated them in having discussions with white people whom in any case did not seem positive about transformation.

- At the end of the discussion, the participants declined the invitation to talk about negative memories.
- With the issue of the Belhar Confession being put on the table, Rev Siphon only stated that it was more important what went on in people's hearts than accepting a document.
- The group stated that in order to deconstruct stereotypes, people had to get to know each other. The female participants felt that the women made good progress with that.
- In the discussions, there was talk about positive stories of co-operation between the two churches, for instance providing food and other necessities for the poor in the black community. Although with good intentions, these projects could seem paternalistic. The idea was put on the table of a more reciprocal relationship where both sides could benefit each other, and promote human dignity.

Müller states in his reflection that in this rural community, there seemed to be a willingness to put obstacles aside in order to reconcile. The concept of forgiveness never featured, although the willingness to put Belhar aside and focus on people's hearts could be interpreted as such. On the white people's side, the need for telling the truth and for restitution seemed urgent. They remarked that the positive things which were shared were valuable, but that it was painful to realise that mistakes had been made - it brought feelings of shame. On the black people's side, internal healing was needed. The discussions ended with

a Sunday service in the DRC congregation. Müller was uncertain about how the few black people who attended the service, experienced it.

Six years after the workshop, in 2012, a discussion between Prof Müller and Rev Anton Doyer, who was now retired, gave an impression of what was happening between the two churches:

1. The USA-based church group *Second Table Ministries* heard about the efforts of co-operation and they became involved in a joint project, establishing an afterschool centre for disadvantaged children in the township. The project was growing.
2. Members of the DRC were actively involved with Rev Siphon of URCSA. They supported him in his difficult work by visiting him regularly and by having discussions with him.
3. Participants in the weekend discussion had ongoing personal relationships with each other and with friends and family.
4. Mutual contact between the women of the two churches was growing. They organised the women's day of prayer together on a yearly basis.
5. Unfortunately, a political right-wing group was playing a strong role in the DRC congregation now, which put pressure on all relationships.

In 2015, Rev Anton gave an update of what was now happening. He stated that:

A number of factors from the DRC side are now hampering growing relationships between the two congregations: A group of right-wing

congregants who regard themselves as the rich and influential, almost hysterically opposed the church council's decision to act as a model for church unity. They not only sank the decision; they also revived other congregants' old fears of threats to their language, culture, property and funds. This same group, under the instigation of an ex-Defence Force general, also protests loudly against the Belhar Confession. The result was that the relationship with URCSA relapsed to the old pattern of as little as possible involvement, except the giving of alms, and paternalism. I get the impression that the church council's focus now shifted to financial survival and maintenance. Another point is that some farmers (fortunately not all of them), see Rietfontein and other villages as a reservoir for cheap, seasonal labour, instead of fellow human beings in need, towards whom we have an obligation and a calling. This impacts negatively on church relationships.

Previously, ubuntu language of vitality came to the fore when URCSA and DRC members in Ohrigstad attempted to deepen their relationship. Much potential was released in the two congregations, which was beneficial to the struggling villages in Ohrigstad: a group from the USA and a DRC group from Pretoria got involved with community development and together with URCSA, they established an afterschool centre and a preschool. Support for Rev Siphosiso's work grew, and mutual ubuntu language as widening community, solidarity and responsibility bloomed.

Though the projects continue, it is unfortunate that the attempt to revitalise relationships and widen community between URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad ended.

From the above account, I identify some factors that may have hindered ubuntu language of widening community: a number of white members in the DRC, themselves previously privileged, find it difficult to live in community with black people. As seen in Chapter 5.4.1, their concern is for their own, and they do not aim to widen their community in fear of losing control. From URCSA's side, the financially unequal relationship with DRC members causes a low self-esteem and humiliation. As reported in Chapter Five, they live and have their church services in a marginalised settlement, which still reflects exclusion of the past. It is difficult for them to initiate equal conversation with the more affluent DRC members.

Below, I describe the story that further unfolded in the narrative conversations I had with URCSA and DRC members. In these narratives, I learned more about the decline of trust, but I still discovered a resilient presence of ubuntu language.

6.3 The narratives of DRC and URCSA members in Ohrigstad

In the individual narrative conversations with co-researchers, a story of estranged relationships, but also glimpses of ubuntu language, unfolded. When I began the research in Ohrigstad, one of the participants told me that the DRC's outreach commission just started talks about ways to reconnect with URCSA. I contacted the current minister of the DRC congregation, informing him about the research. He was new in Ohrigstad - he only started his ministry there in February 2013. He sounded worried about such conversations. He said: "*Die vure is nou net doodgeslaan*" (the fires have just been extinguished), meaning that the conflict caused by the prospect of

church unity has just been laid to rest. He said that the DRC in Ohrigstad almost split because of the discord and great damage has been done. On the one hand, there were those who pushed for reconciliation with the URCSA congregation. On the other, there were those who were utterly against it. He made it clear that he was not in the position to ask me not to have the conversations, but that he did not want trouble, and he did not want us to “*krap waar dit nie jeuk nie*” (scratch where there is no itching). I took note of his concern, and conducted the conversations in a sensitive manner, which is in line with the climate of narrative research.

In asking the research participants to tell their stories of what happened, they expressed sadness, despair, frustration and desperateness, but also hope which is kept alive by ubuntu language of taking responsibility for each other.

Some of the participants told me that Rev Siphon from URCSA worked very hard - his congregation was huge, and he had many contact points to visit. They thought he would have a hard time trusting the DRC again. I was glad when he accepted my invitation to be a co-researcher. His account of the recent history is that of sadness and despair, but also cautious optimism. He talked about the good intentions of the DRC, and an uneasiness in a relationship that sometimes seemed to evolve only around poverty relief projects:

Some time ago, the previous minister of the DRC Ohrigstad (Rev Anton) and I initiated talks between the two church councils, discussing how we could meet each other half way - to get to know - and to help each other. They helped us a lot financially. Their intention was good. I could see they wanted to help. We appreciated it. I felt uncomfortable sometimes. For me it was supposed to be more than that. We were

supposed to learn each other's cultures, and learn to understand each other. To be busy is a good thing, but they can also learn our values. We were moving towards that. They came to us for Pentecost. Celebrating Pentecost together was a big step towards the future. Rev Anton thought about me serving Holy Communion at their church. But I told him: "I do not want to bring trouble - do not rush."

Regarding the poverty projects, some questions present themselves: When do solidarity and humanity become just the giving of alms? When do caring and sharing become paternalistic? In Prof Müller's reflection on the weekend discussions between URCSA and DRC congregants, he stated that there were positive stories of co-operation between the two churches - for instance providing food and other necessities for the poor in the black community - but the idea was put forward of a more reciprocal relationship where both sides could benefit each other, and promote human dignity.

Rev Siphon displayed disappointment in the current situation, although he portrayed ubuntu language as widening community in his congregation by saying that they would always be willing to accommodate DRC members in their church:

Between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad there is a void now. There is no moving forward. There are initiatives to start working again - I hope that when we work together again, that which we did will still be there. Our church always asks what happened. I do not want to say it is because Rev Anton has retired. After he retired, he still came. He helps with services when I am not here. He is willing. Last week the current pastor was supposed to come here with other people, but he did not come - something came up - that also happened other times. We must

have church services together - both sides must be comfortable. We are prepared to accommodate them. That will lift the boundaries of racism.

Sam from URCSA, the rugby player whom I quoted in Chapter Four, is sceptic about attending DRC services, although he lives next to the church. His narrative illustrates the void caused by deteriorating relationships. He recognises a discourse of racism within the DRC, but in line with his positive outlook on situations, he has an optimism that goes against all likelihoods:

I stay next to the DRC in Ohrigstad but I come to church here in Rietfontein (the village). Maybe the reason is religious politics. I wish I could go there, but the pastor who was welcoming everyone, has gone now. He did not look at you as someone from a different race. I have not met the current pastor formally. I am a history teacher at my school - I understand where we are coming from. We must go somewhere together. Maybe our history separated people. However, I feel it is not good. We are in one country - we must be one nation. We must move forward like the South African flag. It does not make me angry. I do not take it personally... Maybe not all of them (DRC members) appreciated this programme to reunite... There is a silver lining - there are still people who come here, like Dirkie and oom Piet.

There is something about Ohrigstad - if you are a new person, and for example, you have a gardener, you pay him R10. Then you go and attend church, and get to know people. They will say - this is Ohrigstad, we pay our gardeners R5, then you also do that. Maybe now that the previous pastor has retired, they will say this was his programme. They do not visit us as they used to. But the willingness is not gone. Though

they can only come here as individuals, not as members of DRC Ohrigstad.

Ephraim from URCSA also mentions a void that is now filled with distrust. He is sceptical about a trusting relationship between the two congregations. He indicates that there is still ubuntu language, but only from individuals. His opinion is that a relationship between URCSA and the DRC does exist, because many URCSA members are domestic workers in DRC members' houses. For that reason the church has to unite:

We had a working relationship with the previous pastor of the DRC. We sometimes celebrated the Holy Communion together - he came here a lot. However, it did not continue. I could not ask why - maybe I failed to ask. I feel sceptical now.

I asked Ephraim: "Do you think people from the DRC feel welcome here at your church?"

Ephraim: It depends on individuals. Some of them visit, and identify with us. Some will not set foot here. Some were here last week, they fitted electric plugs. We are still friends with Rev Anton. We still exchange pleasantries, it has not stopped. We do not have to talk through Rev Siphon with him. What is striking about Rev Anton, is that he is very humane, also his wife - they like people. I will not attend church there. I realised that, when Rev Anton was still there and they had this social relationship with us - in my personal opinion - other members stopped going to the church in Ohrigstad, they went to the DRC in Lydenburg. When Rev Anton went into retirement, they came back. Such observations put you in a position to decide not to go there.

On the other hand, people like the owner of the garage - I observed him. He goes to Lydenburg now because of the current attitude in Ohrigstad.

I Asked Ephraim: “Why would people of URCSA want to have a relationship with the DRC? Do they want to? Do they care?”

Ephraim: Yes, it is important. We need each other for support. Some of the DRC members recognise that, but not all of them. Our understanding is we are from the DRC family. We need to find one another. Apartheid separated us, but we are family. We do many things similarly. Different ways of having church services do not matter - the singing and reading Scripture is the important thing. We would not be creating a relationship from scratch. Some of our aunts and mothers are domestic workers - they are already in a relationship. In church, they must also belong to one another. Then there will not be a relationship of worker and master. We wish the relationship did not stop. We do not know why it stopped. What should be done to reinstate the relationship?

In Sipho, Sam and Ephraim’s accounts, there is an unspoken race discourse. As mentioned in Chapter Two, race is a powerful dominant discourse where black people are believed to be fundamentally other than white people. Black people are seen as different and inferior. A consequence of such a discourse is exclusion, in this case an unspoken exclusion from the church. Interestingly, the term racism is not mentioned in the narratives; it is like an elephant in the room. Is it because there is no hard evidence, that people are afraid to call it by name?

Tolletjie, a farmer in Ohrigstad, illuminates the context in which white farmers have to manage their farms - he is concerned about land reform. He is willing to take responsibility for change, but he is worried about political corruption. In Chapter Five, I described how corruption is prevalent where new political elites have embraced the bureaucratic culture they inherited from apartheid:

What makes it difficult is the politics that are happening. The suggestion from government of a 50/50 dividing of farms (between workers and farmers) - how must I manage that? Even where farmers are optimistic about land reform, the callous politics are ruining positive attitudes. Corruption makes me question if the right people receive that which is apportioned. However, I must cooperate - otherwise I will also lose my 50%. I have a choice: I empower people to manage what they receive properly - or I lose everything.

Tolletjie is heartbroken when he talks about members of the DRC who want to isolate the congregation, although they live ubuntu language of caring across race in their everyday lives. He is disappointed about conflict within the DRC congregation, and how people treat one another. He is not scared to air his opinion to DRC members, and sometimes what he says aggravates them:

What saddens me in the DRC in Ohrigstad - we have right wing people for whom the church is their last bastion, because they feel in the outside world they do not matter anymore. The right wing group is with us. They do not want to reach out. They think: "I must rather spend money on myself and my own group." I was ashamed the last time when we had discussions with Garsfontein church and the USA outreach group: we discussed the water project. They asked in what way our congregation contributed. Shamefacedly I had to say:

“Nothing.” I felt bad. I tried to soft soap it by telling them that the economy was bad. The borehole needs a sun panel, but to ask the church council - I dare not even mention it.

I cannot understand: one of my friends, when you look at his relationship with his farmworkers - it is good. He has a feeding scheme for orphans in one of the villages. However, in church meetings, I cannot believe it is the same person. We are friends, but the other day in a meeting at church, we disagreed greatly. I could see in his body language he was outraged with me. There are people who think: “My faith should not be questioned.” People think the church is their last place of survival; that they can protect themselves inside of it.

The conflict in our congregation is bitter. I was sad that they rejected our pilot project, *Across Borders*. We investigated a closer bond between us and Siphos congregation, with the intention of church unity. It caused immense reaction. I was chairperson of our church council at the time.

I do not contribute financially to the congregation anymore. I only contribute to outreach projects. Before I left the church council, we wanted to send our final year confirmation students on an outreach, to gain that experience. It would cost R2800. The church did not provide any money - I paid for it. I contribute to a feeding scheme, the farm outreach for men and women, and the youth camps for farm workers. I do not attend our congregation’s meals we have together. The last time I told them: “You *dikgatte* (fat bottoms) who are sitting here in church, and who want to eat that food as well - rather give it to the poor.” They were angry.

I am still part of the congregation. I want to be here - these are my people and I want to make a difference. When I was on the church council, we said our mission was: *light to the world*. It does not materialise, we are a lamp put under a bowl. I understand how people feel, but I believe the more you give, the more you will receive.

I think we must discuss these issues once again. But we must not crush one another into the ground. Give each one a chance to air his/her opinion. I cannot deal with what happened - that Afrikaners could be like that with each other. One good thing is the farm ministry that functions well. At a time, I was frustrated because few people attended. Now it goes well.

In Tolletjie's narrative, the same people uphold two contradictory notions: On the one hand, white members of the DRC illustrate ubuntu language in their relationship with the black community. In Ohrigstad, there is ample humanitarian aid by farmers with food schemes, water provision, care for orphans and much more. On the other hand, the same DRC members are also practicing ubuntu language as restorative nostalgia (Chapter Four). They long for a traditional Afrikaner discourse of a closed community in which there is caring and sharing, but only for one's own people. In Tolletjie's opinion, they only want to spend money on themselves and their own group. They want to protect their own community, and they want the church to be their place of survival wherein they can protect themselves. They are even willing to fight with each other for it.

Tolletjie is also honest about his own struggle with the discourse of racism in his life:

Maybe deep down I am also a racist. It is how I grew up. I try to suppress it, but if I examine myself - racism is a devil that should not get any breathing space. A friend was involved in a farm attack. Her son and her husband were shot dead. She is an example: she truly does not discriminate between white and black. If one can feel that... We who were in the Defence Force - there was indoctrination that apartheid was right. That was the problem with the Defence Force: war veterans were not debriefed - white males of my age, even younger - could not process it.

Dirkie, a female member of the DRC, also tells a narrative that sometimes portray a discourse of racism. She tells of DRC congregants who are averse to church unity and co-operation, and they will even fight amongst each other to protect their own tradition. She also realises that ubuntu language of solidarity runs deep in the community:

Black and white people work closely together here. Individually people work well together. The farmers are good to their people; they look after them and do what they can. They would have liked to do more, but they cannot always. Here there are not terrifying accounts of injustice amongst one another, there is respect and recognition. However, if you try to work together as institution, there is a *toutrekkery* (tug of war), a stubbornness. When there are words like “URCSA”, “DRC” and “church council”, it becomes a pressure pot. Then there is no trust amongst the ranks of white people. It is supposed to be a natural process. But us, in our congregation, we as white people, we cannot even deliberate or disagree in a peaceful manner.

We initiated a forum in our congregation to facilitate peaceful debate. We are trying, but this is not even across race boundaries, it is only across boundaries in our own congregation. The forum must provide a space where one can say: "I feel like this," so that we can understand each other. Do we believe the same thing in our own congregation? We have to begin understanding one another. We must walk hand in hand, because the opportunity will be lost.

From my side, I like to socialise with Rev Siphosiso. We tried occasionally to come together. Every time URCSA comes to us, we aim to get a conversation going, to get to know one another. It then stops, because I sense there are DRC members who want to be there, but the moment we eat together, they excuse themselves. It is embarrassing, and I am not prepared to look on. Their perspective is: "I shall talk and listen, up to this point, but nothing further". It costs URCSA members money and trouble to come here - and our hospitality comes to what?

It is also difficult to see how white people can connect with people on spiritual level, just to notice how angry they can get, how they can break someone to the ground - with each other and with black people. One moment your relationship with a black person is proper, but as soon as you come amongst white people, you use derogative language when you speak of black people. People do not want to say in front of each other: "I held a black man in my arms when his child died" - and it happens. One must have respect. If we look at where the church stands in the world - if we cannot even respect each other's differences - how can we respect others? What is the church then other than culture and politics? We are playing church then. Will the church not disintegrate?

This church has potential for more. People are not that conservative, but in the church, they do not want to think wider. I hope our forum will loosen things up, but now people say: “You are confusing the old people with your discussions.” If we can only search for truth together. If we can just discover God’s, will, without one being scared of speaking your mind...

I can only, as an individual, invite Sipho - he can talk to me and I can talk to him. I can also invite others. If it is at my house, I can determine if it will be respectful, but if it is at the church, I can do nothing about how people behave. To attend each other’s church services is a good thing. It demonstrates that we acknowledge one another. Even though we do not understand everything in the service.

A real concern regarding ubuntu language and solidarity in Ohrigstad, is the question of the “haves” and the “have nots”. From URCSA’s side, their congregants in the villages are mostly poor, which causes low self-esteem. If one looks at the houses of DRC members, and that of URCSA members, the financial inequality is clear. This makes relationships uneasy. From the DRC side people do not always know how to practically implement ubuntu language as solidarity. They are willing, but they feel the expectation is sometimes that they must share their money and belongings with everybody. Dirkie is very careful in voicing her uneasiness:

I experience a lot of caring between black and white people here in Ohrigstad. There are people who care for each other on a spiritual level, who stick together through hardships, who cry together and listen to each other’s stories.

However, sometimes it is difficult: we work together with black people who have a ministry on the farms. It becomes trying when the female leader tells people that if they need something, they can come and ask me - it will be cheaper if they borrow from me. People can talk to me - I do not mind. But I am not a bank. I will help make a plan. I do not think she realises: at the end year function for our domestic workers, she conducts the sermon, and then she also insinuates this. We are people, not money holders - it makes one feel objectified. It does not indicate that you are well off when you have things. Maybe the expectation is that those who have must provide. That is how we white people sometimes understand ubuntu: "*They think we must give.*" Maybe we have a misperception.

Dirkie's words show the devastating effect the discourse of poverty - which was socially constructed over many years - have on ubuntu language and relationships. In Chapter Two, I indicated that the effect of South Africa's history of separation would be felt for a long time, because it left the country with one of the world's widest gaps between rich and poor. Dirkie's narrative places this right in the context of Ohrigstad.

Jan and his wife, Ronnie, have been living in Ohrigstad for a long time. Jan is a farmer and Ronnie is the retired principal of the primary school in town. Jan understands the DRC members who are against church unity. He himself feels that co-operation between the two churches is necessary, and he does a lot of work in the community, though not without frustrations. Jan puts blame for estranged relationships on the previous Rev Maphoto of URCSA. It is peculiar to see how Jan's story of Rev Maphoto of URCSA differs from that of Anton and Tolletjie:

My family has been staying here since the time of the Great Trek. I am one of the more liberal people in the community. I believe all the Christians in our community must work together in order to create a better society. I remember a time from my childhood when our congregation was very involved with URCSA and Rev Maphoto. The first breakdown in the relationship was when Rev Maphoto became the moderator of URCSA's General Synod. With the political storm, he neglected us and his ministry with the farm workers. He made more and more political statements. That was when I was growing up. Then we drifted apart.

Jan's perspective on the recent history of Ohrigstad reveals obstinacy and language as barriers for widening community. In Chapter Two, I described how language could be an instrument in excluding people from one's culture. In their restorative nostalgia, Afrikaans people sometimes use their Afrikaans language to separate themselves and their tradition. In addition to that, language is presented as a practical problem in Ohrigstad, because not all URCSA or DRC members are fluent in any common language:

There arose a discussion about church unity with Rev Anton. I do not care about that - I want all the Christians to work together. I have friends who feel differently and I understand their thinking. They are scared and uncertain - the church is the last thing that has not been taken from their hands. They are a bunch of obstinate people. I was present with every discussion between the two churches. One day, I sat in a meeting between ten DRC council members, and ten URCSA council members, with the two pastors. Then 80 % of the people could not communicate - the languages were Sepedi, Afrikaans, and different forms of English, which neither they nor we could understand. This communication gap makes the dream of unity almost impossible. There

was a reality that was unbridgeable. The language problem was an indication of all the other differences between us. After the meeting, I told Rev Anton: “You are busy mounting a dead horse.” It was his ideal, his dream.

Yesterday I listened to a discussion about the Belhar Confession on the radio. I told my wife: “You know what, I understand Belhar, but Boesak¹⁶ has a poisonous mouth.” If I feel like that, what about other people? Now it went like this: Amid discussions of unity between the churches on the one hand, and Belhar on the other, there came a break in a relationship between Rev Anton and the congregation. He was passionate about it. We are friends. It took a long time for our friendship to heal after what I said to him. The backlash is that I have not been elected on the church council again, because they perceive me to be on his side. I tried to protect him. Now we have a conservative church council, who appointed a conservative pastor. Rev Anton’s pushing in the one direction caused a reaction to the other side, which is sad.

I told the new pastor I am ashamed that there is so little contact between Rev Siphon and us. It will be very difficult to restart something in this congregation. It will demand lots of respect between people. People are closing themselves off.

In Jan’s narrative, he voices the frustrations he encounters while taking responsibility for the poor. These frustrations stem from the discourse of

¹⁶ Reverend Allan Boesak is a liberation theologian in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, who fought against apartheid. People in the DRC did not trust him because he spent time in jail for fraud. As he was one of the authors of the Belhar Confession, many DRC members use him as an excuse not to accept the Confession.

poverty that has a numbing effect on the poor. In Chapter Five, I described how numbness could settle in with those marginalised by poverty - they have difficulty taking control of their situation, and their poverty creates a paralysing dependency culture:

There are many good things going on here. The farmer's union compiled a document describing all the projects in which farmers try to help the community. We are a small community - we must live together. However, we can live without politics.

Sometimes I get frustrated. For two years, I took vegetables from my farm to one of the villages. After a while, it became an obligation, people started demanding it. It takes half a day's work. I am also involved with a project that assists people in planting vegetable gardens. The people received a borehole pump, taps and pipes. Every person has a small garden with implements. We sow, and once a week I go there. Then Christmas comes and we have these gardens, and they leave it for three weeks. Nothing is left of it. They did not water it.

Ronnie transformed the white primary school into an excellent multiracial school. She sees small signs of hope in the community. She sees vitality in the community that goes against the odds. In her account, white people put wire around the school to protect their "own", while black people practised ubuntu language of solidarity in protecting her:

I grew up in the Methodist Church. I sometimes think the DRC members are exhausting themselves with all these issues. We do not all sit here and do nothing. We have the outreach with Garsfontein. I am involved in that. We work very hard together with Rev Siphon.

Nevertheless, there is also another side: One black farm worker in our community - he has five children. With his small income, he sent them all to study after matric. We see these things. His children have a future. We all have the same dreams. I am helping at a small black school in one of the villages. The important thing is - you must never take away people's humanity from them. They must know you respect them.

When the first black children turned up at the primary school in town when I was the principal, white people came and put wire around the school to prevent them from entering. It only stopped in 2000. I was the only white principal in the region and I experienced kindness from my black colleagues. Once we had a meeting in a trust area.¹⁷ I was the only white person out of 500 people. When I took a seat, one man grabbed me, but my colleagues immediately helped me. Afterwards they let me know it was just a person who came in - he was not part of the meeting. They always conducted their meetings in English for my benefit.

Constand Viljoen, a research participant, was the Chief General of the South African Defence Force (SADF) during the last years of apartheid. Since his retirement, he has been a farmer in Ohrigstad. I report his narrative in full. There are two reasons for this:

- He represents the group in the DRC who is not interested in church unity, and who did not participate in this research;

¹⁷ Rural areas where the apartheid government put black people after forced removals.

- He has a big influence on DRC members in Ohrigstad's worldview and theology. He is much respected in the white community, and he is on the DRC's church council.

His narrative portrays the following notions, which I explored in Chapters two, three, four and five of this study:

An exclusive cultural and race discourse (Chapter Two): In the history of South Africa, there has been cultural domination through a glorification of Western culture, and repugnance for black culture and customs. Black people could not resemble white Christians unless they had been westernised in a specific way.

A theology of exclusion (Chapter Three): The exclusion and compartmentalisation of a modernist theology can divide people into white and black, male and female, rich and poor. This theology can make religion an individualistic, pietistic, private matter that is kept separate from society and the world. God's work in the world is regarded as the saving of souls for the hereafter. In Constand's words: "We are hindering the work of the Lord" when we involve ourselves in the politics of the Belhar Confession and church unity. The ethics of such a theology make it possible to make "objective", moral decisions, separate from the context and times. Truth about God and the church is seen as universal and eternal.

Restorative nostalgia (Chapter Four): Constand's remark: "I was never against missionary work, but I stood for the preservation of the *Boer* culture in the church", portrays a fear or unwillingness of widening one's community. There is a longing for the good old days of Christian Afrikanerdom and an unwillingness to share power. The "other" is distrusted, and there is a longing

for a place that is missed; a yearning for a different time. Restorative nostalgia calls for essentialist thinking where tradition is something set, and must be protected.

In the history of South Africa (Chapter Five), two beliefs strengthened apartheid:

- The upholding of separate identities is important for the survival of the superior Western civilisation in the country.
- Afrikaner Christian culture thought of itself as the guardian and educator of other cultures.

These elements come to the fore in Constand's narrative:

I grew up in the church, and it meant a lot to me. I have a twin brother who is also in the church; we differ a bit in our politics, but we are not enemies. When we were five years old, the two of us visited my grandfather on his farm in the Standerton district. His wife had passed away long before. We slept in the bedroom next to my grandfather. When we woke up in the early morning, we could hear him doing his morning devotions; he was alone in the house but he still read aloud from the Bible, prayed and sang psalms. It made a big impression on me. Even today, this has been the biggest influence on me, recognising that religion is a personal matter: Even if you are all alone, you can have a relationship with the Lord and worship Him in this manner.

Later on, I attended Sunday school. We grew up in a rural church - Paardekop. My grandfather lived probably 20 km from the town - he

had a horse-drawn carriage with neat, big horses. He used to come to church with his carriage. Upon arrival, he would hook the horses' food (he always brought some extra food along) around their necks, so that they could feed while he was in church. I tell you this story to illustrate my experience of the church. My father died when I was thirteen years old. My mother raised us after that singlehandedly. But what I remember most fondly is our regular visits to church on Sundays, seeing my grandfather with his horses. In Sunday school, in our days we used to have a little book that included a verse to learn and a hymn that you had to know.

I attended high school in Standerton. We had a very active Christian Student Association. The leader's name was Mr Van Vuuren. I say this to say how my religion was formed. We had camps; which was a good experience. On Sundays, we used to walk from the hostel to the church in Standerton where Rev Bartlett was the minister. I met his son at the synod the other day - we sat around the same table - and it was pleasant. I was confirmed in that church. After school, I attended university, and I remained active in the church.

What I mean to say, is that I had a continuous relationship with the church, and for me the *Boer* (Afrikaner) culture and church became synonymous. I believed in God and (being a fitness fanatic in my youth), I would run around the hills of Pretoria and while exercising I would also pray a short prayer to the Lord.

When I entered the military world, we had a chaplaincy. I learned to trust the Lord also in my military endeavours, for example before we would engage in a military operation in Southwest Africa or Angola, the

chaplains would speak to the soldiers. The chaplaincy was focused on every religion, whether you were a Jew, Christian, in an English church... In those days, there was a growing resistance to communism, and the fight that we fought was done to keep Southern Africa, and especially South Africa, free from communism. To ensure that we could live according to our culture. Remember, by that time I already had this inborn religious culture. This stimulated my military career and it determined the way in which we conducted ourselves in the Defence Force; to act within a Christian... One example was a paratrooper operation where we attained our goals, and then I was told that we caught 30 or 40 enemy soldiers, and they wanted to know what to do with them. They proposed shooting them, for fear that by freeing them they may later have to fight them again. I said no, a Christian could not do that - they are prisoners of war and we must treat them as such. We took their weapons but then we let them go. I mention this to indicate the influence of my religion on my approach. This was how it went... I later became the head of the Defence Force.

One other thing - more to do with my politics - my father and his family were staunch supporters of the South African Party (a liberal political party). They supported Louis Botha and Smuts. In my family, I was the dissenter. As a child I disagreed, saying I studied the *Boer War* and realised how much we were wronged, I saw the despair after the war, as well as the struggle with the rebels - I did not see it, but I studied it. I also believed that being an Afrikaner is strongly connected to your relationship with the Lord. When our ancestors came to this country, we believed that we had to live according to biblical principles. Today, this is still very important to me. I have been on the church council in Ohrigstad now for more than ten years - longer than I needed to be - but still I keep on doing my duty.

Closer to the division in the church - my father died when he was 47. On his funeral I said (being 13 years old at the time) that I was going to own my own farm. I later bought a farm and farmed it part time, until I took an early retirement at age 53. I wanted to farm and be part of a farming community - do you understand? I was, heart and soul, part of the Afrikaner culture. Part of our culture was also missions, and while I was never against missionary work, I stood for the preservation of the *Boer* culture in the church. When I retired in Ohrigstad, we had 200 members, a typical rural community that suited me. Because I wanted to farm in a farming community where we live according to Afrikaner culture.

Then Rev Doyer became our minister and he propagated the idea that Ohrigstad must become a model congregation for seeking unity with URCSA, and setting an example for the whole DRC. This caused strife within the congregation that still exists today. There were people who did not attend church anymore, people who stayed away. I always went regularly. He used to organise Sunday afternoon discussions; I attended most of these. At one time, a commission of enquiry was appointed to investigate Rev Doyer. Then he suddenly resigned, saying that he was leaving the church. We called other ministers. We started to struggle financially because of the conflict in the church, and could not really survive (financially). Other congregations had to help us.

Then we called Rev Van Der Merwe, an ex-chaplain. Things improved. We recovered to some extent, because - importantly - church and culture are inseparable. Coming back to Rev Doyer, he once invited a number of URCSA youth to one of our congregation's services; they walked into the church in a line and at one stage, he asked them to illustrate their culture and religion on the stage in the front. It was so

completely foreign that it put us off, and to tell the truth, I stood up and walked out. However, after Rev Doyer left, it improved.

Then URCSA invited us one Sunday to one of their services. I agreed to go; I have no problem. What we experienced there was completely different from how I grew up in the church's culture. Afterwards I said that I was glad that I attended, because now it was clear to me: those people worship the Lord in their own way, and I must not interfere. Neither must I try to convince them to adopt my church's culture. Also, do not force me to accept their culture or even a blend of the two. I told this to Rev van der Merwe.

I once addressed the synod and warned them about the philosophy of Belhar, because I am convinced that the undercurrent of Belhar is political. This issue would never have been raised in the normal cause of events, but it was raised because of political considerations.

Let me tell you something about politics: as a soldier, I studied all the wars that we fought in Africa. I concluded that there were much more new politics active in the South African movements, than what we suspected. After the Second World War ended with nuclear bombs, the world was scared of the destruction of these weapons and changed over to smaller types of wars. When the liberation wars came to Southern Africa, we were orientated towards the West - also in the SADF - having participated in both World Wars, but (now) there was a big influx of foreign elements in South Africa.

After the *Boer War*, fortune seekers came, people who developed the mining of gold and diamonds and who brought with them a new culture;

English was promoted in South Africa, and English became the language of the sitting room, while Afrikaans remained in the kitchen. These things upset me. I said there is a strong political motive for what is happening in Southern Africa, also in the wars. The reason being, our SADF was orientated towards the West, while the liberation movements were orientated towards the East. After World War Two the Eastern Block advanced a communist government (as we have now). An example: after World War Two, Russia was part of the Eastern block and they viewed the Berlin situation differently - do you remember the Berlin wall?

This went on until they finally broke down the wall, but the smaller wars in Southern Africa hitched on to the East and to communism, in order to get weapons and training for the African struggle for liberation. This is the background of Belhar. I maintain that it has a political undertone. I have experienced that culture cannot be separated from religion. You worship the Lord according to your cultural background and beliefs.

I told you what I earlier said about the URCSA visit with Rev van der Merwe. I told him that if he wanted to worship God like this... You know, it is very strange. They start to dance and go wild and sing strange songs using sticks (*kieries*), etc. This was foreign to me and I am not prepared to do this. I asked the synod not to continue with Belhar; I spoke of the farming community and I said that we farmers would not accept this.

Coming to the present situation. I opposed what the synod decided about Belhar. I will never accept it. If the church accepts Belhar, my wife and I will leave the church - this is how strongly I feel about it.

Because of this political background and if they import a new way of worship in my congregation which makes me uncomfortable in my congregation, I will stop going to church. I will lose my church and my religious upbringing.

Then at the Port Elizabeth General Synod they came with a trick; the idea to make room. It was a way to try to make a compromise, but (as I expected) it did not work and the votes were against it. Now it is once again on the agenda for the next synod.

I am not only fighting for our survival, but also for the survival of URCSA. My view now is - and now I am discussing church politics - that there is an irreconcilable difference of opinion about this thing. We are hindering the work of the Lord. I believe we must tell the church: Those who believe in Belhar and want to introduce the URCSA culture into the church - let them go. Let us separate in a Christian fashion. But let us not throw out of the church people like me - allow us to remain, and let us help and support one another like the Dutch Reformed Mission Church was supported by die DRC. What I suggest is: stop fighting and focus on the service of the Lord. Let us do it all according to each culture, and do not try to advance politically inspired unity in the church. Christians can cooperate - I have a small church on my farm. I had a black man who conducted the services there, and it went quite well. There were not many attendees, roughly fifteen people from around the area and my own labourers.

This is how I feel at present. I am not against URCSA. They speak to the needs of a specific group of people. But if you mix these people, you will get the same thing that we currently have in the political arena

in South Africa. South Africa is in an extremely dangerous situation, because the communist movement is strong in the ANC. I told Mr De Klerk (former president of South Africa) this in 1994. Do you know that I was involved in 1994? I strongly argued that we Afrikaners should win some sort of self-governance and I must have met Mr De Klerk almost ten times before the election to convince him that you cannot hand over South Africa - which is a sophisticated country - to a bunch of people with no experience or insight and who are also influenced by communism. This is what I felt about Mr De Klerk.

I was not against change in 1994. Because people would have thought that I was. I even had criticism from the far-right elements. I am not far right. A beautiful story about Mandela and me - I should unfortunately say that Mr Mandela's approach to reconciliation was shallow. He was a communist in his day. Mandela asked me: "Please, the Afrikaner is irreplaceable in South Africa. We must work together to create co-operation." Mandela told me... after the election, he summoned me. He said: "You Afrikaners - you are very humane!" He told me: "You farmers will take a farmworker's sick child, you will take the child and the parent, drive them 60 km to the hospital, put the child in hospital, pay for the care and call regularly to enquire about the child, and after the child recovers, you will bring him back". He said that was "humane". Not all, you get farmers and farmers.

URCSA unity with the DRC is at present an artificial pressure that will force a large number of people out of the church, like me. the "humane" is the important thing. Perhaps in the distant future we will become one. When I was a young man (when I broke away – my family almost spoke English to be smart)... The problem with me, I went into the SADF. I was very radical, I shamefully admit. One day I attended a

political meeting on Church Square. A few of my friends and I bought a Transvaal flag and drove into the Army College, so that the English officers almost fell out the windows (*soos 'n klomp vinke by die venster uithang*). Then I learnt my lesson. There was nothing that brought me so close to the English speaking part of the population, as did military service and war. It takes time to blend cultures so that they can be seen as simply one, and while we had enough reason to despise and hate the English people, I learnt in the SADF to live with them.

It is the same with black and white. This is where Mr Mandela was correct. Mr Mandela had the right culture. He said Afrikaners were irreplaceable, and the Afrikaans church is irreplaceable. We cannot put pressure on the Afrikaner church because of a political hope for some sort of amalgamation - this is artificial pressure that will not work. It must be a natural process. I say, if we now go and say: let the people who are serious about URCSA, let them join URCSA. This will benefit URCSA. This may even start the process that I experienced in the SADF, naturally. But do not reject our people, the black sheep, from the church. I will even say we must help them financially - we already pay for the minister, but the members who feel strongly must go. What is important here? To serve the Lord. How do you serve the Lord? In your own way, and if we can change the URCSA culture so that it resembles what I had in the SADF, we will have a better system. The problem is the political pressure. Politics is a dishonest thing. Remember this definition of politics: a politician is a person who promises you a bridge, and when you come to the place where the bridge should be, you find out that there is not even a river!

Co-operation is good. This is what I experienced in the SADF. In the SADF, I was a stubborn Afrikaans youth (*hardegat*). I suddenly

realised, look, we train together, we will fight together, and we cannot live with this animosity. Take the question of drinking, for example. When I entered the SADF, the English officers despised me. They wanted me to drink with them in the afternoons. I told them that I do not drink, and they could not understand that. One day my commander summoned me and told me: “My young boy, if you do not learn to make your drink, you will never make your staff course”. I answered: “Well sir, in that case I stay a happy lieutenant”.

I understand the people who want to go to URCSA, but the vast majority - and this was shown by the vote - do not. We must not go against the grain. We must allow the people who want to go to URCSA, who have made the cultural shift, to do it; but we must also allow others the time to go forward with their culture and maybe at a later stage, perhaps in fifty or hundred years... We in the DRC must *hambagashle* - move slowly - remembering that a big ship turns slowly; if it turns too quickly, the big ship falls over. This is what I fight for, that the DRC do not fall over.

Rev Anton Doyer and his wife, Toekie, are now retired. They were key role players in building the relationship between URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad. They tell of their personal experience of ubuntu language, but their narrative has many commonalities with the other participants' narratives.

They describe a social construction worldview (Chapter Two), which challenges the objective basis of knowledge, and directs our attention to the social, moral and political. This view invites us to deconstruct unethical discourses like racism and cultural domination.

Their prophetic, contextual theology (Chapter Three) sees the context as formulator for being church. Anton's emphasis is on a journey with people instead of forcing dogmas. They listen to the struggles of people in the community, and their knowledge of God is through relationships. They are a voice for the marginalised. Their theology busies itself with relationships here and now. The Belhar Confession encompasses this approach.

Ubuntu language as reflective nostalgia (Chapter Four), where memories of the past and insights of the present are in critical interaction with each other, opens up a society because it is open ended. In Anton and Toekie's (and other participants') accounts this opens up different ways of living ubuntu language: **identity** is formed where an individual becomes conscious of his/her own being, duties, privileges and responsibility through other people. Toekie talks about how the congregation of Toekomsrus shaped her and Anton's identity. That identity was important to them, because they were outsiders in the white community at the time. **Solidarity and humanity** lead to a shared sense of responsibility, action and social cohesion. The **community is widened** with the inclusion of others with all their difference. Anton's account of the DRC in Ohrigstad's welcoming of the Toekomsrus choir illustrates this. **Individual responsibility** is enhanced by seeing a human being as having inherent dignity and value. It is affirmed in recognising and respecting the same in others.

Anton and Toekie also talk about the strong discourse of racism that runs extremely deep, and of how people can turn against you when they think you are threatening their own tradition:

Anton: When we retired, the conservative people in the congregation, who stood on the side all along, came to the fore. We came a certain way, the ten years here were fulfilling. We had joy in our ministry. We still live here, but we are not part of the congregation - we do not want

to meddle in the new pastor's affairs. We have wonderful friendships within the DRC and URCSA. We still have contact with Rev Sipho; sometimes we go to the URCSA service on Sundays. There are still projects we are involved in, and we also gave over a lot of it to the URCSA congregation (which is a good thing).

In the DRC congregation, the woman who organised our farewell service asked us whom we would like her to invite to sit next to us at the communion table. We wanted people from Toekomsrus (an URCSA congregation, which consists of coloured people) where we started our ministry. It was our first congregation, and it would be special if they could sit with us at our retirement function. We also wanted Rev Sipho, because we were there when he started his ministry. There were also other URCSA members we wanted to be there. As we had a strong relationship with the organising woman, we told her: "We want you to sit there too". She said: "Will you mind if I do not?" We asked again, and she said yes.¹⁸ Her understanding shifted. We are still good friends, though she does not live here anymore. But her view shifted. I counselled her with the death of her dad - he was not in our congregation. People in our area are very conservative, but he was even more. That is where this woman came from.

What was valuable in our ministry, was people who changed with our journey together - we had a ministry together, not me and Toekie alone. Together people began to think differently about God, themselves and their relationships with people.

¹⁸ See addendum 5 for a photograph taken at this Holy Communion

One wonders sometimes: “Should I be in the ministry?”, but it was good years. I did not want religion to be only routine with Sunday service and prayer meetings, like a water wheel, turning around and around. It lets people feel safe, but there are opportunities in the life of a congregation to make a difference. We felt the DRC in Ohrigstad could make a difference. It is a small congregation, but around us are very poor people - financially and in terms of amenities. We could make a difference, even if it was just to strengthen URCSA’s hands in helping the community. We could be an instrument in God’s hands. We were excited about that. We made a difference. Our outreach committee decided to start facilitating between needs and resources.

Once, our first congregation in Toekomsrus asked if their choir could come and perform here in Ohrigstad. We were glad and we informed the church council. They contributed financially for meals for them. The choir came in a bus - seventy of them. It was very far. These people were extremely poor. We organised for them to stay in Blydepoort’s hostel, because they were too many for our small community. We told the congregation that these were good people, warm people. They speak Afrikaans. When they came, our congregation took care of them. It was wonderful to see our congregation serving them. They had a concert in the *Voortrekker* Hall, which is an irony: the *Voortrekker* Hall was named after the Great Trek, which had special meaning for white Afrikaners, and here were these dark skinned people from the lower working class, performing. On Sunday, they sang in our church at the communion service. It was beautiful - they truly lifted our congregation’s songs. Afterwards, some congregants came up to me and said: “Today my head was shifted through what I experienced”. It was good to hear. However, at the next church council meeting, some members asked: “Why did they have to sing at communion? We want to come to the holy table, now there are black people.”

It is sad when people do not even shift a bit. I cannot blame them. Who are we to change them? Many of this were directed at us personally. They tried to work us away. They told us in a straight, friendly manner (because they are friendly): “You are such nice people, and we love you, but we have problems with your ministry.” It did upset us for a time. But we thought we could not just leave the rest of the people. One of the rich farmers told me: “We thought we appointed you for this congregation, but you spend more time in the village.” I said: “Thank you for the compliment, I wish it was true”. Another person said to me: “We do not bring guests who visit us to the Sunday service, because we do not know what to anticipate”. I thought that was good to hear - a church must not be a place where you sit and fall asleep. Looking back: I spent time in the villages and I tried to take people with us on a journey where relationships direct the way, instead of a religion that is forced upon a person.

We know we made a difference - we will never know in what way, or how. What happened was valuable in the great scheme of things. We believe something happened which we will not always understand - even if it stopped. We are sad that it ended ... but we are satisfied.

Klara Masinga is a Lutheran woman in Ohrigstad. She has a good relationship with the white community. She speaks Afrikaans well. She organises alternative festivals on national days. Where the ANC sometimes brings estrangement, she wants to bring people together. However, not many white people join in. It is sad because her aim is to bring white and black people together. People must wake up - this is an opportunity!

Toekie: The World Prayer Day for Women is powerful in URCSA, and I invited them to come and share it with us in our congregation. After we retired, the new pastor asked me to organise it again. I always invite URCSA, and next year it is going to be big. We also have a function for domestic workers, and it is pleasant. At this year's function, black and white women taught each other their traditional songs and games - these are old women, and it comes naturally. It was very enjoyable.

To work for better relationships between black and white people is who we are. When we started our ministry in Ohrigstad, it was not something we even contemplated - it happened spontaneously. Maybe because of our background in the Dutch Reformed Mission church. The sad thing is that we can never tell URCSA why it ended.

We are used to going against the stream: our ministry at Toekomsrus was in the dreadful time of apartheid - our congregants suffered. We were there for them and we learnt a lot. The law prevented us from living in Toekomsrus, and the security police scrutinised us. We were outsiders in the white community, but to be insiders in our congregation was important to us. Through the years we were involved with different issues which always called upon us to take a stand. sometimes we were unpopular. Anton has also been involved in the DRC's gay debate from the start, which few people approved of. With his background in the Mission Church, Anton was naturally one of the first white people to endorse the Belhar Confession. We cannot live without people of colour.

Anton: The right wing congregants have a sense of endangerment, and that causes their prejudices to kick in. One day, a congregant of the

DRC came up to me and said: “You think you know our people? You do not understand who they are. There is a big element who are silently watching you...” This “element” never took part in the discussions. Racism you cannot fight. That wing became stronger in the congregation. But you know what? Last year in October, the whole Toekomsrus choir came to sing at Lydenburg - our neighbour congregation (a satisfied smile).

6.4 Concluding remarks

Different interpretations can be made, following the above narratives of research participants. Destructive discourses of race and exclusion, cultural hegemony and poverty are evident. Within the DRC, one can detect a restorative nostalgia, in which people are willing to fight each other in order to protect their own tradition. However, listening to the narratives, a story unfolds of ubuntu language in which relationships are imperative. It is ubuntu language as reflective nostalgia that enhances dignity and responsibility. The majority of DRC and URCSA participants alike comprehend the community around them, they are worried about the suffering, and each tries in his/her own way, with their own resources, to take individual responsibility.

The individual narrative conversations I had with research participants, flowed into a joint discussion between URCSA and DRC members in Ohrigstad, which I describe in Chapter Seven.

Chapter 7

Ubuntu language - helping us move forward

In this chapter, I ask the primary research question: can ubuntu language assist us in bridging the gap between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad?

In a joint discussion between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad, I discovered the resilience of ubuntu language. In spite of the broader and local histories of trust and distrust, ubuntu language was the dominant language when this group of co-researchers came together.

The individual narrative research conversations with various members of both churches (Chapter Six) displayed an existing bond, which was strengthened deliberately under the leadership of Rev Anton from the DRC's side and Rev Siphon from URCSA's side. Unfortunately, the relationship was later dominated by distrust after a strong conservative faction in the DRC in Ohrigstad became prominent. The individual conversations with co-researchers flowed into the group discussion between them.

The group consisted of co-researchers who on the one hand, had been part of the previous discussions on the relationship between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. On the other hand, co-researchers who were not part of the previous discussions, but who, following my individual research conversations with them, took part in a group discussion. All the participants in the group felt a revitalised relationship with each other was necessary, and ubuntu was a language that shaped their thinking and actions. I invited all the participants of the individual conversations to the group discussion, and for different reasons not all of them accepted. Some of the members of the DRC did not feel such a discussion was necessary. It was difficult to set a date which suited everyone, and that caused some co-researchers of the DRC, and many of URCSA not to

attend. Unfortunately, there was a funeral in the URCSA community that day, which caused only Rev Siphon and Sam to take part.

Before the joint discussion, I was unsure how to initiate the conversation without me forcing my own agenda. I was nervous; fearing that the co-researchers may feel it a waste of time for them. However, as soon as I arrived at the meeting place, all my fears subsided: these people have a relationship that surpasses my knowledge - they are the experts on their own experiences. With the assumption of intersubjectivity between researcher and participant in mind, I knew I could rely on the co-researchers' local knowledge.

The group discussion was held on a farm, which participants from URCSA and the DRC knew well. Dirkie and Tolletjie, the owners of the farm are well liked in both communities. Dirkie prepared a space for us underneath a big tree where we sat in a circle. Sitting outside, feeling the breeze and hearing the birds' songs, made for a tranquil atmosphere from the start. The discussion started in the morning, and it ended after a delicious meal we ate together, which assisted in strengthening the ties before everyone went their separate ways.

We started the discussion by implementing Mamphela Ramphele's *Letsema Circle Healing approach*, which commences from the understanding that before people can walk together, they need to sit down and talk (Ramphele 2013:132). The *Letsema* circle is a collective action forum to talk about problems, which are too big for individuals to deal with. According to Ramphele, it is important how people sit together - the circle is the African traditional platform for dialogue. It makes for a level playing field that includes everybody and makes eye contact possible. Newcomers can easily enter the circle and are welcomed, for the circle is simply made bigger. This is essential in the stimulation of ubuntu language - "I am because you are" (Ramphele 2013:132).

The *Letsema* circle healing approach captures ubuntu language when co-researchers greet each other in the circle, acknowledging, “we are seeing you”. In Zulu the greeting is *sawubona* - I acknowledge your presence, your humanity (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009:66). The greeting is an affirmation of being connected to each other, recognising that we are human beings through each other’s humanity. The greeting is more than introducing yourself by your name and surname - the traditional African greeting includes your clan name (Ramphela 2013:132). In our group discussion, we introduced ourselves by name and surname, but more importantly, each of us told our co-researchers who our parents were. This set the tone for narrative enquiry, and it immediately deepened the existing connections between people who already were familiar with each other. We listened attentively. After hearing each other’s stories of where we came from, trust was established. Part of the reason was that we could see each other’s humanness, and connect with it. The participants’ stories about their parents differed, and each story further opened our eyes for each other.

I want to quote from the discussions about the participants’ parents, because it demonstrates their shared humanness:

Anton: My father grew up without a father. He farmed with sheep. Then he fell in love with an English teacher, and she expected him to complete his matric before they could get married.

Toekie: My parents were gentle, loving people. My father taught me a love of nature. We lived next to the Magaliesberg, where he taught me about the moon. They were not happily married, and they got divorced. Then our lives became a bit disorderly. But the brokenness was all part of it.

Ronnie: My parents were very poor. My father was an electrician, and my mother left school in standard six. It made an impression on them that they were not learned people. But my mother always said: “Money cannot buy breeding.” They could not give me a nice dress for school, but they taught me other things. We grew up in the Transkei - Xhosa realm - and my parents could speak the language. We were seven sisters.

Jan: My father worked in the civil service, and my mother got a job at a dairy in Pretoria. They were very poor when they grew up, but they were hard working and responsible.

Sipho: My mother is the one who made me the person that I am. My father was not there - she was a single parent. I was confused when I was about to finish my studies, and suddenly my father appeared. He expected me to call him daddy, and he was under the influence of alcohol. My mother was not educated - she was poor, but not spiritually poor. I grew up in church. URCSA is the only church I know. My grandparents also played a great role, as in our communities grandparents look after their grandchildren. That is why I respect mothers and grandparents - they play a great role in the community. My mother taught respect and she gave me confidence. If she could take care of me - anything is possible in life. People feel hopeless in Gautswane (the village). They think they must go to big cities. But I learnt from my mother everything was possible. My grandmother was from the Cape Province, she was a *Kleurling* (coloured person). I learnt to speak Afrikaans from her.

Tolletjie: I grew up in an ordinary Afrikaans home. My father was a labourer, a mineworker, and in those days, a mineworker had a very small income. They were hard people, who called a spade a spade. My father could speak nine different dialects of African languages. He also went into Africa to recruit more labourers. My mother was very gentle - a homemaker who was soft spoken and creative. She was the opposite of my father. He was rough and insolent.

Dirkie: My parents did not have an education. My mother was part of a big, traditional Afrikaans family.

Sam: My parents are still living. My father is five months short of ninety. I come from a very big family. In our culture, a man has more wives, so I am from the second wife. He only had two wives. There is coherence in our family - you would not know who is from which marriage. You know the place *God's Window*? My father is from there, our ruins are there. On the old graves, we have put tombstones. My father grew up there. He went to school in Lydenburg (he documented his history). He walked on foot from Graskop to Lydenburg to attend school. My grandfather was an Induna, his name was Koveni. Kowyn's pass was named after him, except they spelt it wrongly. My father was in education, and he retired in 1992. The old school that he established is still next to our church. I respect him much, because he is the one who brought education into the village. My mother did not go to school; she was a dressmaker. I grew up in a middle class family.

While sharing these narratives, the participants asked each other questions, and even added to one another's stories. Sharing anecdotes about our parents, stories emerged about how we came to where we were sitting in this

circle (Ramphele 2013:133). We realised that every participant - whether black, white, male, female, younger or older - acquired ubuntu language from their parents, especially in the sense of having respect for a human being. Each co-researcher grew up with humanity and solidarity with people from different races and lifestyles. After listening to the co-researchers' stories, one participant remarked: "The common factor of us all who are sitting here, is what our parents imparted on us".

This was evident in the statements of each participant: "With my parents I saw how to treat every person with respect, regardless of their status"; "We did not look down upon others, and we had wide-ranging relationships"; "My parents were very poor when they grew up, but an important belief of them was to share what they had with other people".

Respect for people was something that all the participants learnt from their parents and it reminded me of a prophetic stance regarding theology, where doing right is more important than being right (Chapter Three). Kobus, a member of the DRC, said the following about the respect he learned from his parents:

My parents lived the example of respecting others. My mother was Rev Lebone, the moderator of the DRC in Africa's secretary. She did his typing for him. He came to our house frequently. What I learnt from my father, was that if you did not know someone - a stranger - you had to greet and be friendly. It empowered me. I do not think: "I do not want anything to do with you because I do not know you."

Social accountability - with its acute awareness of injustice (Chapter Three) - was also a common notion that emerged from participants' background

stories. A DRC participant recounted the experience of social justice in her parent's house:

My parents were forty-two years old when I was born. We did not grow up poor - we were four children and they could provide for us. My mother was a gentle person, but my father was tough. I did not always understand what they did, but in retrospect, I can see they were revolutionaries in their own way. They were unconventional. At the time, I did not understand: we had an extra room at our house and there were always black people whom I did not know, who slept there for the night and ate with us. Sometimes they arrived very late. When my mother ordered me not to tell anyone, I was angry because I thought she was ashamed. Only later on my sister told me my parents provided a place to sleep for these people because of the *klokstelsel* (curfew), which prohibited black people to walk around in white areas after a certain time at night. My parents hid people who could not get out in time, so that the police would not arrest them. I thought my mother was ashamed, but what she did, was actually against the law. She did not want people to know, because she was on the women's ministry in church and my father was on the church council and on the school board. I grew up with a radical stance against injustice, and my children are also like that. Sometimes they get in trouble because of it. They know that people are equal, and rules that make people unequal, are wrong.

All participants in the group grew up with a sense that theology has to be prophetic, which also naturally flowed into the notion of social justice. A Christianity that highly regards social justice places the church in the context of the world. It resists an inwardly focused stance, and it gets involved with the poor and marginalised (Chapter Three). Dirkie remembered the following about her parents:

My mother's example was that of someone who held onto God with great faith and respect, without really articulating it. My father was a great philanthropist and liberal. In our family, we thought differently about things - you did not just accept something without exploring it first. We were fervent about injustice.

Rampehele's *Letsele* circle healing approach was helpful in weaving our personal stories into stories of how life is experienced by those sitting in the circle, depicting the challenges specifically in the relationship between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad (Rampehele 2013:133).

As in Rampehele's approach (2013:133), when all became quiet after telling the stories of their parents, we took a short break for the co-researchers to breathe, to relax and to imagine their dream for the community they live in. The silence created an imagined space for participants to explore new possibilities (Rampehele 2013:134). Before the silence, I asked them: "What is your dream for Ohrigstad? What picture do you have in mind for the church and the community?" After the silence, each participant got the chance to express their dreams, and for the group to ask questions or add to what was being said. Because trust and the worth of each participant were established while telling about our parents in an ubuntu tone, the co-researchers shared their dreams eagerly within the circle. Each individual's dream was listened to with respect, and the ubuntu notion of "I am seeing you" prevailed. It was important that each individual knew he/she had valuable ideas to be shared. We recognised similarities between our dreams, even though participant's stories differed.

After each individual shared his/her dream and the circle reflected on it, I endeavoured to establish what debilitating dominant discourses prevented these dreams from being realised. I asked the co-researchers: "What are the

stories in the church and the community which stand in the way of your dreams?” Again, space was provided for them to ponder the question before each got a chance to share their thoughts.

A further step was to create space for new narratives to be constructed: how can we turn the dreams into reality? I asked: “Can you think of things that make your dream strong?” After a time for contemplation, unique outcomes and new possibilities emerged.

After the conversation quietened down, I intended to facilitate more imagined space for these new narratives to thicken, but the co-researchers were so enthusiastic about the new possibilities that they started talking without any need for silent pondering. I asked them: “Can you think of ideas that you can bring into this circle that can make your dream even stronger?” I reminded them that each idea was significant in reinforcing the new stories we constructed together.

In the group discussion, ubuntu language entailed more than just conversation - it was a way of being together. It not only materialised in the way we recognised each other in the circle and in the participants’ narratives - the group also created it as the stories unfolded. Ubuntu language helped us moving forward, and it displayed new possibilities. It helped co-researchers to negotiate identity which is not dependant on race; it unleashed potential and hope for a robust community where diversity is celebrated; it brought forth solidarity, humanity and strong individuals who took responsibility.

7.1 Ubuntu language and discovering identity

Finding an identity is a question that all groups in South Africa are struggling with. The history of apartheid may be revealing of how white Afrikaans

speaking people struggled to find a place in a colonial South Africa. Perhaps this is true of all South Africans.

The apartheid regime's classification of identity on race alone diminished identity for all. In contrast, Desmond Tutu locates identity in attributes that are more significant than race. According to Tutu it is necessary for people in South Africa to share certain values, otherwise we cannot engage with one another. He states that ubuntu is a perspective from which we can see one another as more than just black or white (Hulley, Kretzchmar, Pato 1996:94, 104). Ubuntu language humanises its performers. There are stories of white Afrikaners practicing ubuntu language without calling it by that name.

According to Martin Prozesky, the question ubuntu language asks is: "What kind of relationships will build and sustain healthy communities"? The answer is respect. It is more than common courtesy: "It involves having a deep knowledge of those one relates to, their families and origins, coupled with a deep appreciation of their worth" (Prozesky 2009:9).

Ubuntu language locates people's worth and identity within community with each other. Kobus, a participant in the group discussion, illustrated this by telling us about his black friend whose humanness manifested itself when he shared precious memories of his childhood with him:

It is interesting that we return to the theme of our parents and where we come from. Jeff (my friend) had a serious need to show me the house where he was born and grew up in. One day I went with him to Bosbokrand. He said: "Do you remember the house I told you about? This is it. And do you remember the hut where my mother's teachings as a *sangoma* took place? It is this hut". I walked with him; I met his family, and we came back. Between him and me, one more wall came down. My wife and I now moved further away from where Jeff lives. I

have not seen him in a while, but he started ministering in Maiepa and it is half way - I will find him there and talk.

Ramphele (2008:79) articulates the effect that apartheid still has on how black and white people perceive each other's identities. She states that many black people have only experienced white people as authority figures, and never perceived white people as ordinary humans struggling with the mundane trials of everyday life. Similarly, few white people have perceived black people as fellow humans who have the same capacity for pain and joy. They only know black people from contact with them as labourers, and to encounter black people in power positions is distressing for them.

In the group discussion between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad, the narratives about each participant's parents revealed shared values of ubuntu language. These narratives helped us to discover each other's identity, and to discover surprising similarities. Kobus told the group about the bread and Coke he and his colleagues of different cultures shared at work. His story about eating revealed his identity as a human being to the group. Siphon from URCSA commented: "Sometimes people will think Kobus does not eat bread, but if you share food, you see people are doing the same things. If we do things together, we see they are doing the same things that we are doing, they are drinking the same, eating the same. It is a very good thing that we eat together".

Siphon's thoughts on URCSA, the DRC and the community he lives in, emphasizes how the ubuntu language of sharing can accord identity and dignity to people without hope:

For me personally, the two churches must work together. In the black community, people are hopeless - in the villages, there is no running water and there is no food and very few jobs. In us working together, they will not feel so isolated; that they do not belong. It will bring hope and encouragement. They will then see: "We are also from this world." We can share many things. I have been listening to where we come from - we all have respect. Because people are hopeless, they do not respect themselves or other people. First, you have to respect yourself. People are reckless with their lives and that is why we have criminal cases. Young people use drugs and alcohol, and there is HIV/AIDS (though people still hide it). They will have respect when we work together; we can instil those important values. In our church, we have a youth movement - a programme that we started with young children. We teach them respect, and they talk to each other nicely, they laugh and are happy.

By hearing the story of the community where Siphon ministers, Siphon's identity as a compassionate human being was acknowledged by the group. At the same time, by recognising Siphon's identity, the participants identified subjugated aspects of their own identities. Karien realised through Siphon what she could be capable of:

When I think of today - one person that gives me hope, is Siphon. I am honest with you. At a time, I went to Gautshwane (the village) on a regular basis; they were our only neighbours. It was draining to visit, because I did not know how those people made a living. I wanted to cry when I saw the suffering. But then I think about Siphon who must try to minister to the people: Siphon, I will pray more for you, because I do not know how you do it - to be confronted repeatedly with suffering. If Siphon

can stay there, and keep on doing what he is doing, then it cannot be that difficult for me to get something going in this place.

Ubuntu language as partaking in each other's narratives opened the group's eyes to other people's identities - their being together enhanced each individual's dignity and intrinsic value. Through our relationship with each other, we also regarded other people outside the circle with respect, because we saw how difficult their situation was. An example was Sipho's story of his community. Ubuntu language as connecting with each other, revealed the potential of participants' identities, and confirmed and established new ways of being.

7.2 Ubuntu language - unleashing potential

Jonathan Sacks (2007:125) talks about a covenantal society and a kingdom of priests in which all members in society bear the burden - all are guardians of the collective conscience. This reminds me of a community where ubuntu language is spoken. Sacks argues that in such communities, collective responsibility gives energy and it generate ideals. It creates active and empowered citizens (Sacks 2007:125).

In Ohrigstad, especially in the villages, hopelessness sometimes threatens to erode vitality and creativity in the community. Sipho's narrative makes it apparent:

The way of living stands in the way of my dream. People are poor, economically and spiritually. Unfortunately, I am only dealing with the spiritual part. How do you feed people spiritually when they are physically hungry? Also time - people do not have time because of

work and responsibilities. People do not have the energy, because of hunger. Those without jobs are always sitting hopelessly at the corner, watching if something will come. Hopelessness - how do you deal with it? How do you give people hope? The youth programme is one small thing. There are two volunteers. One is a qualified assistant social worker - if she gets a job, she will be out of poverty. The other one is studying to be a youth worker - it is an opportunity out of poverty. Education helps, but in the meantime, one's parents, brothers and sisters are hungry.

Anton agreed with Sipho and made it clear that this hopelessness is part of the bigger picture in South Africa:

What Sipho is talking about, is community poverty. People do not have jobs, or their salaries are not sufficient. That is something that can paralyse a community. It becomes part of the hopelessness of people's existence. Our country is at the top regarding the gap between rich and poor. It is a macro giant against which we are fighting, and it is making us feel the trouble is not worth it. It is an enormous thing, which is seemingly getting worse, in spite of our lovely stories and attempts.

In communities where hopelessness such as the above tends to numb people, ubuntu language has the potential to activate vitality through relationships between human beings.

An example of ubuntu language as the process of mutual enrichment between the vitality of individuals, and thus creating hope in a society, is the Belhar Confession (Chapter Five). The Belhar Confession calls for unity, justice and reconciliation. It offers a route for the future. This document, accepted by

URCSA and highly regarded (if not yet accepted) by the DRC, lays down an agenda for both churches' engagement with our context. A vibrant vision for the future echoes the ubuntu anthropology that sees human beings as bursting with a vital (godly) life force. URCSA theologian, Nico Botha (2013:118) says that such ubuntu language opens "a window of hope" for South-Africans to form communities of deep caring that goes deeper than just tolerating one another.

In the group discussion, ubuntu language ignited a flame of hope: as we sat together in the circle, looking into one another's eyes and sharing in each other's identities, personal vigour was activated and enhanced. In sharing our narratives, potential and energy emerged. The participants' thoughts portrayed this:

Toekie: When we talk together like this, I start to think and I get excited - one must just start doing. There are small things we can do, which can make a difference.

Dirkie: When I look into the eyes of each one of you, it gives me hope. It gives me the awareness that I am not standing alone... I do not feel alone. There are people who still care, in spite of disappointments, in spite of thinking we were wrong to believe it could work. We must hear more from other people who also want to make it work... It must not be stifled.

Dirkie's above words are in the context of the DRC in Ohrigstad where a dominant conservative group is present, which makes it difficult for people who want to move forward with URCSA. People such as Dirkie can easily be overcome with hopelessness and be silenced.

Part of the vitality and potential that ubuntu language unleashed in the group, were unique outcomes we discovered through sharing our stories. The unique outcomes became possibilities to build on:

Jan: I think, if you deliberately look, you will find things are happening in Ohrigstad and in society. Someone said how easily a lie could spread, and how difficult it was for the truth to spread. I think we must search for the good news, and build upon it.

Sipho: I think it is already happening with me. The youth ministry is bearing fruits. We started with Sunday school, which developed into a day care centre. The programme also have an after school centre now... we realised that when children came home from school, they were alone - nobody cared for them. We talked about it in our previous meeting at the centre: we said we saw the future of these children being better. People were positive to say the children were happy here, they were willing to learn, and they are now used to the programme. We have a problem with numbers - there are many children. We wish the programme could grow because the grade 8 group is the group that we started with and you can see the difference now. They are still coming, even if they are not required to. The programme is growing and the light is shining brighter. Even those volunteers from the community who went to study outside, come back and visit to say they want to see the legacy they have left. Therefore it is for the community, but also for the volunteers themselves. You can see they are growing. I wish it could still be better. White people are in many ways involved, especially economically - they assist us where there is a need. When we request help, they are always willing to help us. We also receive information that people pray for us, which is very important. Also for me - sharing all these with my friend here (*Anton*), encourages me.

Hearing the narratives of hopelessness in the community could easily have had a despairing effect on the group. The co-researchers knew these stories, and to experience it through Sipho's words again, conveyed a deep respect and sadness for the people. Without taking anything from the heart wrenching difficulties people encounter on a day-to-day basis, ubuntu language prevented the co-researchers from being paralysed by it. On the contrary, a mutual enrichment between the vitality of the participants released hope, unique outcomes and new possibilities that could be explored.

7.3 Ubuntu language as widening community

Although South Africa at present is characterised by the richness of multiculturalism, the different ethnic groups have often lead to cultural hegemony (Du Toit 2004:442). Cultural hegemony caused a fragile relationship between the DRC and URCSA. Ubuntu language, in contrast, celebrates multiculturalism and diversity, and opens up communities to accept others.

In the individual conversations with participants in Chapter Six, the hope was expressed that relations between the DRC and URCSA will one day transcend superficial niceness, and grow into a healthy community that accommodates differences and survives conflicts. Ubuntu language can produce enriched communities that go beyond sameness and theoretical speculation. It can teach us to allow differences and to practice healthy collaboration as equals. However, this can only happen when people of different cultures and histories value each other for the sake of their humanity (Shutte (2009:381). This was apparent when the research participants shared their dreams for the church and Ohrigstad in the group:

Karien: My dream for Ohrigstad will be for people to overcome their fears in moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Not just black and white. We are *inkommers* (strangers), which means our family have not been living here for 150 years. We do not have a history here, and we do not always know what people are talking about. We have only been living here for 7 years, and we will never live here long enough to become indigenous. Is it like that in the black community as well?

Sipho: Yes, I was a victim of that in the village.

Karien: It is difficult to overcome. The first three years living here, I was angry with Ohrigstad. I cannot help it if I was not born here. I think it is an inherent part of Ohrigstad and it is not only about black and white. People feel safe in the familiarity of living here for many years. In Ohrigstad, there is a division between old and new residents, rich and poor, black and white, farmers and mineworkers. Because it is a small community, people feel threatened by otherness. My dream starts in the church... my dream is that people will overcome their fear for the unfamiliar, saying: "We become friends of the unfamiliar." Then it will not matter if you are DRC, URCSA, farmer or non-farmer. We are all Christians and we respect each other.

Kobus: My dream for Ohrigstad is a normalised society. We see people who are not all the same - some like sports, others not. That does not make us angry at each other. Colin (a white colleague) and I differ more than Jeff (a black friend) and I. We must perceive each other as human beings - that is something mutual.

Sam, who is one of the few black people living in town, has the following dream:

Sometimes I do not go to church in the village because I have no petrol. Then I think: "Here is a church next to me - why don't I go?" Nobody told me not to. It is an attitude of me. My dream is to one day wake up, go, and pray with Kobus in this church. It is just an attitude of me and other black people. Some would ask: "Is this your mother church, why not go?" But I feel I belong in the village. There is nothing wrong with DRC people, but I think I do not belong there. I think: "Maybe there will be tension." Maybe there would not be. When I joined the rugby team, just a few wondered why I was there. With time, they accepted me. Now there are also three black players from Steelpoort, playing for our team. It tells me that the great divide, which was created by the system, with time, it can go away. Especially with Christians - before God there is no white or black. The DRC have always been there when we needed them. With time, maybe we will only see people of God, not black, white, yellow or blue.

Sipho agreed with Sam: "During the World Cup rugby - everybody came together; why can't the church do that?"

By practicing ubuntu language in the group, participants were able to discuss obstacles in the way of a healthy community. In a society where political correctness prevents people from being honest, participants in the group felt safe to truthfully discuss sensitive issues, which they perceived as standing in the way.

One such issue was language. In Ohrigstad - as in many rural towns in South Africa - there are people speaking different African languages, people who

speak Afrikaans, and a few who speak English. DRC members speak Afrikaans, and many of them harbour very sentimental feelings where their language is concerned, which are difficult to change. On the other hand, URCSA congregants speak a variety of African languages, and many do not speak or understand Afrikaans. The language problem was raised by a question from one of the participants and it triggered a long discussion, which went back and forth. Ronnie, a DRC member who is involved with the Bible Club at the primary school in town, asked if the group could help her with a concern she had: while all the children attended Bible Club in the school hall, Jeff, the African evangelist took the black children to a separate classroom. As Afrikaans is the teaching language in the school, all the children understand it. To Ronnie, the separation of the children seemed like discrimination and unacceptable. She wondered if maybe the children enjoyed singing different songs and doing different activities.

Sam, whose two children attend the school in town, thought about it and replied:

I do not know. Culture is dynamic. The children could be from different backgrounds, but things are changing, culture is changing. My child plays with anyone. He sees a person, not colour. I could not imagine him being in a different class. My children speak Afrikaans at my house, because they know I cannot understand. People are from diverse backgrounds - it is difficult to agree on language. We should accept to disagree, in order to agree somehow. It is difficult for people to compromise their language, because language is who you are. However, my kids are super in Afrikaans, though it is not my mother tongue. Circumstances made them attend an Afrikaans school. I would not say separating the languages is wrong, as long as the content is the same.

Karien described the dilemma of language through her experience:

I am in charge of the Bible Club, and I do not know what to do. What we realise is that the children who come into the school from the villages, cannot speak Afrikaans. Thembi and Jeff take them, and talk a little bit of Zulu, Sotho, or Sepedi, so that they can understand. They need the foundation in their mother tongue. Maybe it is wrong. Thembi reads for them and tells stories; not from a white Children's Bible, but from a perspective where they can understand. On the other hand, Jeff wanted to show the older children the Jesus film in Sepedi. The children then said no, they wanted to see it in Afrikaans. So we got the Afrikaans one, we put all the children together, and they watched the film in Afrikaans. Some children would ask Jeff to read in English, but most will ask for Afrikaans.

Jan also described his experience of the language problem: "When Jeff comes to my farm, he preaches in Swazi - 70% of my people do not understand. I tell him, but he carries on. Language is a bigger problem than we think.

After Kobus concluded that language should never be forced, I asked about the use of language in unity between URCSA and the DRC. In this instance, it occurred to me how valuable local knowledge is when dealing with an obstacle. The group agreed that the language barrier should not be allowed to stop them moving forward:

Jan: The dream is that we work together more closely - it does not have to be as it is now. However, there is a reality for now and that is language: I cannot understand in Siphos church. He is better than I am

because he can understand better Afrikaans than I Sepedi. But it is important that we keep on talking in order to trust each other. We have to change this place; we cannot go on with our distrust. Black people have been treated very badly by white people, and white people have sometimes been disappointed when trying to make things better. It must not prevent us from moving forward.

Sipho: For me, language is not a problem, but for people who cannot understand, Afrikaans will always be a problem. Language does not have to be a barrier for us working together, and sitting like this together. I understand, you understand. People have difficulty separating language from culture. Anton once told me Afrikaans is one of the youngest languages. Which is the oldest culture? We must compromise. We have to compromise.

Kobus: Last weekend we witnessed a wedding ceremony of a black couple, and the guests spoke two different black languages. The bride and groom were from two different cultures, and everything was translated. There was no problem. We can be okay with different languages. But many Afrikaans speaking people become emotional about their language.

Sipho: What I do in my congregation - when it is time to pray, I give any congregant a chance. We do not all speak the same language - they can pray in their mother tongue - Shangaan, Tsonga, Sepedi etc.

Kobus: At my workplace, we open our meetings with prayer. Anybody can pray in his or her own language, and sometimes people even pray a silent prayer. Why not?

Anton: I know two words in Swazi - *yebo* and *dualisa*. When I fill up with petrol at the pump, I say the two words to the man who works there, and then we are friends. If he speaks further in Swazi, I just explain that I cannot understand. Mister Mandela said if you spoke someone's language, you spoke to his or her heart. There is great value in learning each other's languages for the foundation of relationships... We cannot deny it: language and culture go together. But I am convinced that language is no barrier - we go to school together, we work together, and in sports, we play together. Where there is a will, there is a way. If we are motivated enough to build relationships, the language question will be answered - but in the process, not beforehand. We come together because we are each other's friends. It is like water that looks for a way to flow. And we do it on many levels already in places you won't expect. We will find a way, if we walk together... When we are at Siphos church, we understand in a way. It is true in our own lives: before I got married, I thought: "We have different backgrounds - where we grew up, our history, our baggage - how can we get married, it will surely not work out?" But we loved each other, and went for it. Forty years on, we are glad we did. We sorted it out along the way. The same with church unity: we can worry about finances, language, property, culture, and distance. Then we can say it must not happen. But what are we here for? To normalise the community, and to let something of God's Kingdom break through. Forty years onward, we will be glad. We will say: "It was good".

When the research participants shared narratives and dreams from their own lives, alternative possibilities for widening the community between the DRC and URCSA materialised. Kobus' story highlights the notion that ubuntu language means the inclusion of others into the community with all their difference:

The dream I am having... Have you noticed that we are all different from each other? Sam and I, Karien and Tolletjie, are different from one another. Moreover, it is not a sin - it is not something evil. However, we are also the same. Sam and I - yesterday I saw him at a meeting, I sometimes see him at the shop, and it is nice to chat. Karien and I became friends with Thembi and Jeff from the farm ministry. They come to our house, sometimes to discuss business, and other times just socially. We also visit them. We realised that we could differ on some things, and we could feel the same about other things...

I work at the mine, and my colleagues and I have a mealtime club. Every morning we put money on the table - it does not matter how much you contribute. Then we buy coke, chips and bread. If one is hungry for more, then you can bring something that you like. It is very enjoyable - the first half hour of work. Ratau does not eat chips and it is fine. We are eight black and two white people. At first, I thought Colin does not eat with black people, because he chooses to eat alone. Then I realised he did not want to eat with me either. He does not eat with other people – he wants to be alone with his lunchbox. We are all fine with it...

We can greet each other. For me it was a big step at first to greet unknown persons as I drove by them. Like the person who sells oranges. It is pleasant - he also realises it is nice to talk with white people, or people he does not know. I work in Burgersfort, and so do other people from Ohrigstad. There are only a few taxis on the road, so I pick people up at the junction. One gets over barriers by getting to know somebody. At the next stop, some people get off and others get into my vehicle. Luckily, I have a double cab *bakkie*. One grandmother carries a big load, and I drive towards her when I see her. We have conversations, and the other day she told me she also knows another Kobus. He is a pastor who prayed for her when her hands were sore:

“And look!” she said, “My hands are still well.” Incidentally, my brother works with that Kobus - you see, that is normal in a normal society - we are all linked in some way. My dream is a normal society.

When Toekie remembered an experience earlier in her life about widening community, it brought more possibilities to the circle:

When we were ministering in the Mission Church in 1988, theology students from the university came to our congregation in Toekomsrus. Each student stayed over at a congregant’s house, and it made a difference to that student, until this day. They never departed with what they have learnt in those modest houses... I want to stay over in Gautswane (one of the villages). I want to eat there and be social. If we could have Holy Communion together, it would be a way to cross the boundaries. It is not so difficult.

The conversations in the circle gave rise to an interesting dynamic: On the one hand, by practicing ubuntu language as a group, ubuntu language also manifested itself in the group. On the other hand, as ubuntu language was practiced and established itself at the same time, it opened up the possibilities of ubuntu language widening the community in Ohrigstad.

Sipho, Sam, Tolletjie, Dirkie and Anton’s words illustrate the above:

Sipho: The fact that I am able to talk about what is going on, and tell someone else... To be able to tell you, it makes it possible for me to dream further. I have also hope, that when the eight of us listen to each other, the next time we will be sixteen and it will grow and grow. It will get better.

Sam: My dream is made stronger after realising today that what I thought was an iron curtain is actually a cloth, which could be removed in order to see each other. I am very positive that things could be practicable. All along, I have said: “What would those people say”, without asking them to hear what they said before I made my own judgement. My attitude made me pre-empt negative things. The curtain is not there now.

Tolletjie: I see people can change; the will to change must just be there. One must get to know people to see what they are really like, instead of having perceptions. We must cross our history barrier, and understand one another in normal circumstances.

Dirkie: I can hear that we have many shared dreams, which can be helpful. A practical thing for me to do is to invite four or five people who are in hopeless situations, together with others, on a Saturday just to talk like this. I can organise it through Siphoh. We have many people who can do it together... Like today, we can duplicate it. We can come together, not in order to plan something, but to be with one another. In time, we can inspire more people. People can come here, or we can go there. We must create opportunities for more contact.

Anton: Maybe we must say after every other full moon we should visit Siphoh's congregation, so that we can become familiar faces there.

7.4 Ubuntu language as solidarity and humanity

Ubuntu language provides an understanding of interconnectedness and accentuates taking responsibility for one another. In his book, *God is not a Christian* Desmond Tutu (2011:22) states that ubuntu language spawns the notions of generosity, hospitality, compassion, caring and sharing.

In the group discussion, this notion of ubuntu language came to the fore in the solidarity with each other and with the wider community. It was true for black, as well as white participants. There was compassion that went deeper than a mere sense of human rights. They realised that if one person suffered, the whole community suffered. Du Toit contends that the manifestation of ubuntu language as solidarity was not a foreign concept for white Afrikaners, especially in times of poverty and oppression (2005: 854). In the discussion it was clear that the humanity and solidarity the co-researchers felt, was not limited to their own culture.

The group related instances in which they recognised the humanity and solidarity between different people of Ohrigstad. Anton recounted the following:

Two things that give me courage are, firstly, some time ago, Sipho told me he received offers from affluent congregations in Pretoria, but he stayed here. He knew they needed him here. He cries for the people's suffering. Secondly, I always jog on the slope in front of my house. The other day, I saw someone driving past. I always greet the people passing me. Every time I jogged towards this person, she drove on. As I just got frustrated, the car stopped at my gate. When I approached the car, my old friend, Jennifer Mletsi got out of the car. She was on her way home (she is a nurse). She told me she saw my wife and me, and did not want to disturb - she just wanted to greet. We stood there for about five minutes, talking... That gives me hope.

Ubuntu language as solidarity was something every co-researcher perceived as vital to the well-being of the church and society in Ohrigstad. Anton stated the following:

We are talking about hopelessness, inequality, disrespect and unfamiliarity. My dream is friendship. For me friends are very important, on a personal level. What did apartheid take from us? Friendship, each other's friendship, that we can know, understand and be involved. When one sees a friend with a problem, you cannot look the other way, even if it is a big problem, which you cannot always fix. A friend says: "I care and I want to help." If we can become friends again, then all the rest will emanate. How do we become friends? We have to think creatively. My dream is that in Ohrigstad, we will become friends across colour barriers. We must be people who are involved with each other because we are friends.

Toekie's story depicts a broken community, and she wondered if ubuntu language of humanity could heal some of the brokenness:

I have a disturbing image in my head: the other day I was on my way to Siphon, together with Allen who helps me in the house. Next to the road, we saw a little boy with just his undergarment on. He did not know where he was. Allen picked him up, and asked whose child he was - he was under the influence of alcohol. When we asked around, we were told he stayed three houses from there, and it was a drinking house. When I drove on, I thought that it is possible for us all to prevent such children from ending up on the street under the influence. We can instil the value system of Siphon's youth programme in the community. On the

way to Sipho, there is a small nursery school on the right. They are struggling, but it can be easy to just go in and help. We have lots to share with each other.

While the group discussed their dreams for Ohrigstad, I became conscious of the fact that ubuntu language as humanity and solidarity was also something that participants struggled with, because of employer/employee relationships. A consequence of our colonial and apartheid history is that many DRC members are white farmers, and many URCSA members are black farm workers. The difficulty is, on the one hand, having an ubuntu relationship of solidarity with workers, and on the other hand, being an employer who has to make decisions. Dirkie and Tolletjie voiced this:

Dirkie: It is also very difficult when you have a spiritual bond with someone: how can such a person understand when you have to retrench him or her? You lie awake at night about this person. Also with disciplinary steps - how can people comprehend it?

Tolletjie: You live with a person; you do everything together; you drive him to the doctor; he turns to you for help; you know his family, his children. It is not easy to retrench someone.

Though inequality in relationships can have the potential of diminishing ubuntu language, I realised that it could also be the other way round: Ubuntu language of solidarity between employers and employees can create a humane working environment in which employers are treated justly, and as fellow human beings.

Besides the employer/employee inequality, financial inequality was also prevalent among members of the DRC and URCSA. This is primarily the result of the racist structures of the past. On average, the white DRC members are much more affluent than black URCSA members in Ohrigstad. Although it invokes a sense of humanity in DRC members towards URCSA members, it is also an obstacle hindering solidarity.

One of the participants voiced this extremely sensitive issue:

I think part of the problem is that some DRC congregants think that all URCSA wants is money, and they do not want to keep on giving, as they are struggling themselves to make ends meet... I think it is the wrong perception. What we need between the two churches is a support system, which does not largely revolve around money. We must explain to people how they can help without the starting point being money. In addition, when people are really struggling, you naturally give money and food - you cannot ignore it.

What this co-researcher said, is a reality that can be overwhelming. Financial inequality in a struggling community has the potential to put the notion of “everyone for him/herself” above ubuntu language as solidarity. On the other hand, it can destroy an underprivileged community’s self-esteem.

While talking about this, the group fell silent - talking honestly about such a sensitive issue is uncomfortable. Because I am a member of the DRC myself, because I am a South African, and even more - because for the moment I saw myself as a member of this research circle, I felt overwhelmed by the issue. There is no easy answer, and the problem will only be solved when the gap between rich and poor in South Africa becomes smaller. However, the local knowledge of the participants pointed us to the possibilities of ubuntu

language as solidarity and humanity. Kobus, a member of the DRC, spoke about his experience:

My child's school had a budget meeting three days ago. One of the main issues was money. We do not have enough money for the school, and a group from Pretoria have enough money. What I want to say is - it is not only white people being the haves, because it is not. In certain ways, white people are the have-nots. It is the first time we have to budget for a fund raising - usually it was only for a bonus. Now we look to other, bigger communities for help, without it being a humiliation. In the world it works like that - some have more and want to give; others have less, and want to receive. That is how it is. Our church actually gives much too little to URCSA. There is the perception that all we do is give money, which actually we do not. What we have to do is reach out from both sides and say: "Here we are, we are neighbours, and we are family". It is more about breaking down the barriers than just sending something. Is it not a perception?

Kobus's stance on this resonates with Itumeleng Mosala's description of economics from the perspective of Black Theology: Black Theology bases itself on economic morality. "*Human beings* and their well-being are the starting point and the goal... *People* are the basis and the content of the morality of this economic system" (Mosala 1986:122).

Sipho who, in the individual research conversations, mentioned his reservations about the DRC just giving money and goods to URCSA, responded on this:

I always say it is better to do things, to talk and pray together... working together. There is that perception of URCSA always contacting the DRC when they need money. I think it is wrong. I believe we should work together. For example, we are raising funds to restructure our church. We want to do that on our own. When the money is there, it will be more helpful if Kobus can come with his overalls and spade, and help with the building.

Sharing each other's narratives in the group depicted solidarity and humanity the participants experienced in their own lives and it generated alternative possibilities. In addition, it emphasised the importance of local knowledge. In practicing ubuntu language, solidarity and humanity were also created among the participants. As they looked each other in the eyes, they took part in one another's stories of hardship and in the small but significant stories of hope. Ubuntu language in the group instigated the co-researchers to humbly search together for answers to difficult issues.

7.5 Ubuntu language and taking responsibility

Contrary to the idea that ubuntu language may prohibit strong individuals taking responsibility, ubuntu language calls individuals to take a stand against injustice. The case of Beyers Naudé and other DRC theologians who challenged the DRC leadership and bore a prophetic witness illustrates how ubuntu language cannot be equated with mere populism, but usually requires uncomfortable choices and taking responsibility. According to Prozesky (2009:9) an ubuntu ethic does not turn people into passive beings with no room for personal initiative and creativity.

It is interesting that the factors the group mentioned which suppressed individual responsibility, did not sprout from ubuntu language. On the contrary: time, exhaustion, the lack of planning, transport, languor and selfishness were some of the reasons cited:

Dirkie: On a practical level: if you work long hours, time is a problem. Transport is also a problem for many people, but one can make a plan. We must have gatherings such as today more often, so that we can get to know more people. But we must do it often; not once a year, so that it can develop. If we start small, it is possible; it will sort itself out naturally.

Karien: Time is a problem. People are struggling to survive - with time, money, etc. Long distances cause us to be on the road a lot. Our children are far and we are protective of our time. The effect is that we as a family do not go out, and reach out often. We want to stay at home, because we do not see each other a lot. This limits wider relationships. Even attending church is a decision we have to make every time. To reach out must be a conscious decision to say we *are* going to do it. Many people are just struggling to get through each day; they do not have the energy. Reaching out to one another must be a long-term venture, and that takes time. If time stands in the way of existing friendships, then so much more for making new friends. People are withdrawing because they are in survival mode.

Toekie: Things that stand in the way of my dream: the very bad road - Anton wrote a letter to the local government, asking them to tar the road. Practical things like driving after dark. In addition, we are always waiting for more people to join us - we must plan. We must break away

from our own comfort - it is easier to read a book on a Saturday afternoon.

Sam: What restricts my dream of association is time - we have different activities. We can arrange things like today. However, we (from URCSA) are only two here today. Our activities are on Saturdays; yours during the week. We must make some sacrifices. If one could have a programme, once or twice a month, with time the dream could be realised. With no planning, it will not work. It has to be kick started.

Tolletjie: People are busy, but we farmers - who work with people all the time - we are involved with each other. Many of our workers are members of URCSA. However, there is seclusion, irresponsibility and spiritual superiority. On the other hand, it is difficult with an employer-employee relationship: how can one suggest coming together without it sounding like an order?

In addition to the above barriers, distrust and hopelessness were factors that led to a disconnection between people in the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. Jan, a farmer, shared his narrative with the group:

I always say one should start with one's own people, though the struggle to survive is escalating. I used to plant herbs and vegetables in order to create jobs. I put R2 million aside for salaries. Unfortunately, bad things happened. I tried to strengthen relationships, but then people from my own farm robbed me from R250 000. I could not get an inkling from anybody about who was responsible. It botched relationships that have been built for many years - now we cannot trust each other. It threatens my own existence, and innocent people's

livelihoods. This is the tough reality... One can have optimistic dreams at night. We always had mutual respect - I have been living here for years. However, something is happening here which is out of my control.

Sipho from URCSA takes responsibility for people overcome by hopelessness in his congregation, but it is difficult when political parties bring false hope in the community:

Politics are standing in the way of my dream to give hope. Politicians are playing with people's emotions. They know people are hungry. During the elections, they are active, making promises. Afterwards they are gone. I warn against it from the pulpit, and then I am unpopular.

Sipho's words resonate with the broader context of South Africa in which Ohrigstad finds itself: power politics and money often dominate the caring and sharing of ubuntu language (Chapters Two and Five). Politics can also anger people so much, that it makes it difficult to keep on taking responsibility. Ronnie, who is involved in education, stated the following:

I sometimes have a rage - I cannot understand: I have gone through many highs and lows in education. With the student uprising - I was with them at first, but when they burnt the first building, I was angry. I said: "I am not with you anymore". I have no tolerance for things like that. You get bad days, and then you get good days - I live from day to day.

As seen above, there are a number of real difficulties standing in the research participants' ways of building relationships. However, ordinary individuals who practice ubuntu language and take responsibility can bring forth a resilient hopefulness:

Jan: If we do not like the world we are seeing, we must change it - we as Christians. Where we are able to break down the big distrust and fear, we learn to trust each other. The church's job is to see what we can do about the hardship. Sometimes one is overwhelmed by the vastness of the problem, and then you just freeze. But it is good to follow your dream, as long as you keep on moving, step by step...

Kobus: Jan said a great truth - as long as one keeps on moving. You do not need to come to a resolve immediately; we must just not stand still. I want to keep on doing the things that I believe are working, and which are good and enjoyable...The dream of a normalised world is not farfetched. For me the future looks good... I have hope, and it will be nice for me if people can find hope in different ways. We must not only look at the bad things that happen, because there are bad things. I want to, in spite of bad things that happen from time to time, keep on hoping.

Karien agreed: "But we cannot keep hoping on our own - we must hope together".

Discussing these issues together in the group, relieved some of the numbness and hopelessness: in practicing ubuntu language, the resilient hope resulted in taking responsibility on a practical level:

Dirkie: I want to start on a smaller scale, maybe in one of Siphos sections where he ministers. I can see us having church services together, and having Bible study or discussion groups like now. It must be practically workable, with people who live near to each other. How can we have respect if we do not have contact with each other? You cannot have respect from a distance. One needs to acknowledge a person - one has to look and see the person with his/her pain and joy. We need to get to know each other's hearts. Then we can understand. We can have a fête together; not for the money, but to work together, because then people get to know each other.

For Ronnie, to be linked to the church is not as important as taking responsibility in her everyday life where she meets children:

I do not want to be linked to the church. I want to be linked with the youth of our country, because that is where my passion lies. I am in the privileged position to be with children every day. There is hope that burns in me when I stop in Bosbokrand and they run towards me. Every child wants to touch me, and I touch them. They are glad to see me and I am glad to see them, we always dance and play a little. I do not have to go out and search, it is there with me every day. It is my costly responsibility, because I must utilise the time to do it right. It is a responsibility, but I am here for the youth. We must teach them - black and white. We must teach them to take responsibility for their own actions. Our children must learn that we are equal, but now we must work together. I teach the children one must fix a window when you break it. We must give children the tools to take responsibility. In the church, we must take responsibility for our actions. We must start with small children - then, one day we can overcome poverty and crime.

Once again, as with identity, widening community and vitality, the ubuntu language we practised in the group, urged us to take responsibility for each other in the circle. One example was Tolletjie, one of the DRC members, who took responsibility in the form of an apology:

I want to apologise to Siphso for all the years I have been living here, in which I have been on the church council, for giving so little of myself. I want people to understand each other. I grew up with them, but if you ask me today: I do not understand a black person's thoughts, and neither does he understand mine. I apologise for my part in it.

This participant's heartfelt apology is what Denise Ackermann (1996:52) calls *lament*. She argues that lament is a crucial step in reconciliation: people will point out that lament is the prerogative of those who were wronged, but white people also need to cry out to God for deliverance from our murky past and for healing from the wounds of our history.

In this discussion one can see that, instead of diminishing individual responsibility, ubuntu language renders people to be co-responsible for one another, and to take responsibility in the community.

7.6 Ubuntu language - bridging gaps between members of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad

The language of the Christian Bible is similar to the language of ubuntu in the sense of neighbourly love, respect, caring and sharing. In the church, everyone is familiar with this language.

Ubuntu language and the values of the Bible offer a shared language for bridging the gaps between members of the DRC and members of URCSA, when it goes deeper than just a communication tool. According to Brouwer (2011:13), we need to learn a “practice of deep listening, bringing the other to speech, listening and speaking conjunctively”. We sometimes need to break the walls between us through ubuntu language without using words, just by being together, by breaking bread, sharing and eating. The Christian rite of communion - for example - is aimed at exactly that. When Christians share communion, they celebrate the listening, sharing, receiving and giving of one another, that ubuntu demands. It was - ironically - the unwillingness of a number of DRC members to celebrate communion with black and coloured fellow-church members that caused the break in the (once united) DRC in 1857. It severed relationships across racial lines.

In the group discussion, co-researchers voiced their longing for renewed ties between URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad:

Sam: Most of these people are communicating informally. The only thing is - why can't we also communicate in the church. How can we keep the flame alive?

Ronnie: Sam, you must come to our church.

Sam: I will. We have to make the communication formal in the church. And we are not the only people... There are others, like Stephan, who is a big friend of mine. Rev Doyer was conducting church services, but the flame went out... We need a match to light it again!

Perhaps circles as the one we had in this research - where ubuntu language brings the focus to a contextual, socially accountable morality - could assist in healing the wounds of the past.

In his article: *Processes of reconciliation and demands of obedience* (1986:161), David Bosch describes how the church should conduct herself in her task of reconciliation. This resonates with our experience in the group discussion:

- Bosch argued that the church should refrain from **cheap reconciliation**, which means applying some **generosity without honesty and true solidarity**. Freire (1970:28-29) defines the difference between *false generosity* and *true generosity*. He says that any attempt to “soften” the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of false generosity, which is nourished by despair and poverty. For this reason, the dispensers of false generosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source (Freire 1970:28-29).

True generosity comprises of fighting to destroy the causes that nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the “rejects of life”, to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands - whether of individuals or entire communities - need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work, and in working, transform the world (Freire 1970:28-29).

In the group discussion, when the co-researchers discussed the balance between genuine solidarity and giving, it was clear that ubuntu

language could assist in building deep relationships of humanity, which go further than a false generosity and the DRC giving alms to URCSA. I was touched by the manner in which Sipho and Kobus deliberated on finding a way to work this out. Kobus said that he had no qualms about it: people who have, should give to those who have not. Sipho in turn invited Kobus to come with a shovel and help build at his church.

- Bosch (1986:126) states that church members in South Africa are **prisoners of our history** - that black and white church members look at each other through the keyhole of this prison. This stands in the way of a normalised society, which the co-researchers in the group discussion dream of: “We cannot shake off our past and start anew at square one. We take our history with us to the future” (Bosch 1986:162). But he argues that instead, the **church should become prisoners of hope**.

Ubuntu language in the group discussions helped the co-researchers explore stories of hope that already existed in the community. It also revealed the co-researchers as **agents of change** (for instance Kobus, who uses his vehicle as a taxi), and it vitalised them to start making hopeful and practical plans. This stands opposed to a restorative nostalgia where people only take the grandeur of their history with them - absolutizing it and making it normative for the future. It also brings change where movement becomes impossible because people take only the guilt of their history with them (Bosch 1986:162).

- According to Bosch, the biblical concept of reconciliation has as its corollaries the notions **repentance and forgiveness** (1986:163). Although it is twenty-two years after apartheid, the need for repentance is still present for some DRC congregants such as the participant who apologised to Sipho during the group discussion. Ubuntu language in

the group enabled an openness in which he could apologise in a humane way that was not forced.

- Bosch states that in ordinary inter-human communication people are usually more aware of the sin of the others than of their own sins. Hence, when talking about reconciliation, the other party has to agree to my point of view. We speak the **language of winners and losers**. To make headway using this type of language, can be difficult, because people are too divided (1986:163).

In the group discussion, ubuntu language created space for **moving beyond our differences**. This was especially the case when we talked about the issue of different languages. While it had the potential to hamper any movement, the co-researchers looked at each other for answers. They came up with alternative stories in the community where language barriers were not a problem. The co-researchers' minds were opened when Anton stated that it works like a marriage: there may be many practical problems beforehand, but that it can all be worked out along the way.

- According to Bosch, the church has the task of **becoming aware of the injustices** that take place in the community (1986:170). Practising ubuntu language, the participants not only became aware of the distress in Siphos' community - they took it to heart. Hearing about people's suffering does not make such an impact as looking someone in the eyes, and really listening to his/her account of what is going on.
- In the group discussion, we talked about what stood in the way of the participants' dreams for Ohrigstad. Mostly, they admitted that it was time and pre-occupation with their own lives. It was such a struggle just to keep everything together every day that they did not make the effort to come together. Distrust and previous disappointments also played a

role. But the group realised that they had to **turn away from self-preservation**. The gospel challenges us to “leave the self behind” (Bosch 1986:167), and ubuntu language in the group assisted in it taking shape. Participants voiced the responsibility each of them planned to take, and to do justice.

7.7 Deconstructing subjugating discourses

In the group discussion, ubuntu language assisted participants in recognising and deconstructing destructive stories and myths they had about one another. An example was when Sam said he first thought there was an iron cloth between black and white, and now it was gone. Following, I identify three discourses that occurred:

7.7.1 The discourse of race and otherness

A dominant discourse of race and otherness ignores and denies other worldviews. In Chapter Two, we saw that it reduces people’s faith in their names, languages and their heritage. A resistance against difference elicits negative stereotyping and a patronising tolerance of others (Minnema 2014:2). Miroslav Volf (1996:75) describes how we act on otherness: on the one hand, we assign others the status of inferior beings - we push them aside, so that they can stay in their proper place. On the other hand, we exclude others by abandonment; we close ourselves off from them so that they cannot make inordinate claims on us.

In Ohrigstad, the above history of exclusion is still present. The mostly poor, black people live in the villages with little space, while mostly white people stay in town and on their farms, where there are much space. The white DRC congregation is at a spacious building in town, while the URCSA congregation

in the village is at a small, simple building in the village. The separate living space makes regular contact between black and white very difficult, and while the two congregations are on each other's consciences, it is easy to forget about one another in the day-to-day business. A discourse of race and otherness causes white and black congregants to defensively avoid each other rather than learn from each other.

In addition, Karien's observation about fearing otherness went further than race. She stated that in the small community of Ohrigstad, there is a gap between old and new residents, rich and poor, black and white and farmers and mineworkers.

In the group discussion, telling stories about their parents, the notion of otherness and race was deconstructed. Ubuntu language created a space for co-researchers to move from the self to the other - to imagine the world from the other participants' knowledge of the world. Telling these stories was an experience of learning from others (Minnema 2014:1).

Ubuntu language in the group assisted in challenging the dominant discourse of otherness in which one's own worldview is absolute and unchallenged. It aided co-researchers in putting themselves temporarily in each other's shoes and embracing each other's identity. Difference was not seen as a threat, but as an aspect of joy and wonder (Minnema 2014:2). The participants were amazed at Sam's story of his grandfather being a great induna, and they were surprised at how much their upbringings had in common. Alternative stories from the community in Ohrigstad were told, for example Sam playing in the town's rugby team and friendships between black and white. One story that stands out for me is about Kobus who offers different people transport in his double cab *bakkie*, and how they - outside of the church - care for each other like a church cell group. The participants realised that they were already agents of change and that encouraged them.

7.7.2 The discourse of rich and poor

In any society, and in Ohrigstad, money and private property determine the economic, social and political power of groups and individuals in that society (Duchrow 2014:1).

In the group discussion, this was clear when Siphon talked about the hopelessness in his community. The discourse of poverty, which was socially constructed over many years in South Africa (Chapter Two), still renders people powerless. Siphon explained the circle of hopelessness people are trapped in: the only way to escape poverty is to study, but if you study, your family do not have the means to survive. Anton named this community poverty.

As the powerful gap between rich and poor remains wide in South Africa, so it is also between the DRC and URCSA. The two churches in Ohrigstad are not exempt from this issue. The DRC congregants are mostly those who own property and decent employment, and URCSA members are mostly poor.

In talking openly about the sensitive issue of the haves and the have nots, the group could reveal the effects of the problem on the relationship between the two churches: when does the allocation of money by the relatively rich become the mere giving of alms? The group discussion allowed co-researchers to search for ways to deal with the problem. Ubuntu language in the group demonstrated how mutual relationships, cooperation, empathy and solidarity could be a starting point to deconstruct narratives of hopelessness, shame and fear regarding rich and poor.

Kobus stated the simple reality that when people have more, they should give more, and when people are poor, they should accept more. Siphon invited Kobus not just to give, but also to give physical assistance in renovating their

church building. This confirms the importance of practice as the starting and end of doing theology (Duchrow 2014:6).

7.7.3 The discourse of language

In apartheid South Africa, Afrikaans became the language that was required from black people. Language became an oppressive discourse, which marginalised black people. In the individual research discussions, it was clear that in the relationship between the DRC and URCSA today, Afrikaans is still sometimes used to exclude people (Chapter Two).

While using ubuntu language as the language of preference in the group, a safe space was created in which co-researchers could discuss the above candidly. Instead of only seeing a threat in language differences, co-researchers primarily saw each other as fellow human beings. This made it possible for Siphon to frankly state that Afrikaans is not the oldest language, and needs to compromise. The language discourse was further deconstructed by participants telling alternative stories from the community, in which language did not have an influence on relationships. Discussing the alternative stories rendered them to look differently at language barriers - it made it less of an all-consuming problem.

7.8 Summary

When past dialogue between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad petered out, so did the relationship, giving rise to misunderstanding and suspicion. The research conversations reveal, in contrast, openness to ongoing conversations and a willingness to foster deeper understanding. I believe that the group discussion opened a space that accommodated alternative experiences and narratives (Eze 2011:300). It also created an imaginative

space in which alternative ways of being could be pondered. I experienced the following remark by Jonathan Sacks (2007:117) to be true in this research:

“Stories recapitulate the human experience of time: the open future, the outcome dependant on our choice, the alternative possibilities that lie before our imagination and our strength or weakness of will”.

In the group discussion, ubuntu language offered unique outcomes in strengthening identity, unleashing vitality, celebrating diversity, awakening solidarity, revealing humanity, bolstering individualism and enhancing Christianity. It strengthened the participants, because they realised they were not the only ones who felt something had to be done - to be a community of hope in the midst of despair (Bosch 1986:169). The questions are: will it strengthen them enough in the task of challenging their fellow church members to change their way of thinking? Will it strengthen them enough to take action?

The next, final chapter is the concluding reflection in which I include the participants' reflections, an interdisciplinary reflection and final remarks on this study.

Chapter 8

Reflections and final remarks

In this final chapter, I provide the following reflections on the research:

- 1 The research participants' reflections on the narrative conversations;
- 2 A reflection on the research conversations from another discipline;
- 3 Final remarks regarding the primary and secondary research questions; the validity and contribution of this study; and possibilities for further study.

8.1 Participants' reflections on the narrative conversations

After the research conversations, I sent the transcripts to the co-researchers and collected their reflections.¹⁹ Some of the URCSA participants reported that the conversations made them realise they could not give up on their relationship with members of the DRC. The conversations reminded them how crucial it was to pick up the pieces. The group conversation gave them hope, especially in the case of Rev Siphon, who recognised that old friendships with members of the DRC still existed and that they still prayed for him and thought about him and his congregation. Their support encouraged him. Another source of hope for URCSA members was that, where they initially thought that the barrier between black and white in Ohrigstad was indestructible, they now realised that they actually had a lot in common with white participants. They made new friends whom they could greet and exchange pleasantries with in the streets of Ohrigstad.

¹⁹ The co-researchers' reflections included personal conversations and e-mails.

Three months after I received this feedback, Rev Siphon and I again discussed the process over lunch. He informed me that the relationship between URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad was gaining momentum again, and that he and the current pastor of the DRC were now conversing regularly.

Rev Siphon remarked that he read the transcript of the group conversation repeatedly, and it made him think about the underlying racism in Ohrigstad. It worried him because according to him, racism was such a hurtful discourse that he did not even want to consider it. He suggested that some DRC members probably only wanted to protect their own culture, language, and their religious tradition. To see it in this light was more acceptable to him. The personal struggle with racism in society is evident in Siphon's differing accounts. In one of our earlier conversations (Chapter Two), he stated that racism was rife in Ohrigstad. He recounted an incident when he drank tea with a white farmer, and the farmer's son asked: "Dad, why are you drinking tea with a black man?" At the time, Siphon expressed his sadness about racism that was "something evil".

The DRC participants, from their side reported that the discussions revitalised and motivated them. They realised they were not alone in their desire to strengthen the relationship with URCSA. They felt they were isolated voices in a congregation where conservative voices had the final say, but now they knew there were other voices too. The group conversation motivated them to robustly participate in ubuntu language in their church and community. Anton stated: "I was reminded of so much goodwill and positivity, which just waited to be unlocked". One concern they had, was that the time limit on the conversations did not allow for planning, in order to cement the ideas that came forward.

I had a discussion with the current pastor of the DRC in Ohrigstad three months after the feedback. He was not part of the conversations, and when I

initially contacted him, he was sceptical about the research. He was worried that it would polarise members of the DRC congregation, where there was already tension about the relationship with URCSA. However, in this later conversation, he stated that the research conversations did not cause further conflict; on the contrary, the DRC invited URCSA to join them to erect a stall at their upcoming fête.

8.2 Interdisciplinary reflection

In order to reach a more comprehensive evaluation of the research, I invited Dr Gerhard Genis, a scholar in Language and History at the Department of Applied Languages: Tshwane University of Technology, to reflect on the group conversation between URCSA and DRC participants. In his article which casts an interesting light on the Ohrigstad experience, *The “bit-less” corpse or mannequin manqué: South African Great War poetic embodiment 1914-1918*, he reflected upon another South African story, the South African Great War (Anglo-Boer War). He analysed a number of poems that captured the war experience within a psychoanalytical, postcolonial and poststructuralist framework. A number of remarkable similarities came to the fore.

Genis describes how the war poems reveal the embodiment of blackness, whiteness, masculinity and colonialism (Genis 2015:3). He construes South African history as characteristic of the opposites of the “sublime-civilised (white settler) and the abject-uncivilised (black indigene) bodies” (Genis 2012:4). War poetry shows that the “othering” of bodies during the Great South African War reached its height in the concentration camps, where English-speaking settlers conveyed physical, psychological and cultural desolation onto the “genetically inferior” black indigenous and Dutch settler

bodies - they became the “walking dead” (Genis 2015:4). After the war, the othering of the black body and the safeguarding of white hegemony were perpetuated with the “Black Peril” debate, which suggested that the black body posed a physical and economic threat (Genis 2015:10). According to Genis, the cultural hegemony that materialised in the psychological and physical othering of bodies is still prevalent in South African history and literature, wherein black and white are “sutured into the bloody seam of colonial contact” (Genis 2015:4).

In the interdisciplinary dialogue with Genis, I utilised Julian Müller’s questions in his article, *Transversal rationality as a practical way of doing interdisciplinary work* (Müller 2009:207). I posed the questions as follows:

1. When reading the conversation, what are your concerns about the participants?
2. What do you think will your discipline’s unique perspective be on the discussion?
3. What would your major concern be if your discipline’s perspective on the conversations might not be taken seriously?

In the following reflection, Genis comments and sheds further interesting light on the conversation themes. I address his concerns and interpretations after each question.

When reading the conversation, what are your concerns about the participants?

I want to start on a positive note. The participants give the reader real hope that the racial divide in Ohrigstad may be overcome. Siphos practices what he preaches - the ubuntu language. The other participants also share in this language by referring to “breaking down the barriers” (Kobus), “to acknowledge a person” (Dirkie) and “take responsibility for our actions” (Ronnie). Their perseverance in using ubuntu language indicates that shared experiences may be stronger than the concept of race. The reference to eating together is a very personal ritual and indicates the participant’s (Kobus) willingness to accept the other as an equal.

However, the question that arises is: will the good intentions be sustained? The participants want to get together to share their experiences. They mention various practical barriers to achieving this - time and transport for instance. The bigger problem may be the communities in which they live that do not seem to trust each other due to the scars inflicted by apartheid. Ohrigstad also represents a microcosm for the whole country’s woes: the lack of trust and understanding across the racial divide.

Genis observes that the participants share in Siphos practice of ubuntu language in referring to the breaking down of barriers, acknowledging a person and taking responsibility. In the research conversations, I did not mention ubuntu to the co-researchers, but throughout the discussions, they demonstrated the possibilities of ubuntu language. Genis indicates that the shared experiences of ubuntu language may be stronger than the concept of race. This was evident in the group conversation, where the shared narratives of ubuntu language assisted in bridging gaps between URCSA and DRC participants for the duration of time they spent together. Genis argues that

Kobus' narrative of sharing a meal with his colleagues indicated a willingness to accept the other as equal. The meal we shared after the group conversation also strengthened ubuntu language by acknowledging each other's humanness.

Sharing a meal brings the question of sharing the communion table with one another to the fore. Chapter Five describes the painful story of the separation between the DRC and her "daughter churches" that started at the communion table. In the DRC family, much has been lost because of this. In the research conversations, Anton and Toekie showed how celebrating the Holy Communion with URCSA members shifted some DRC members' mind frames, leading them into a new experience of Christian community.

Genis' concern about sustainable good intentions was shared by the Ohrigstad participants in their reflections. The time frame of the research did not allow for a practical planning session, but from Rev Siphon and the current pastor of the DRC's accounts, a regular conversation is starting to take place again. The two churches are currently reaching out to one another.

What do you think will your discipline's unique perspective be on the discussions?

Karien's observations on "otherness" and that "we become friends of the unfamiliar" tie in with postcolonial literary theory. The "other" (or unfamiliar and strange) is a term for subjugated colonised people. They are in direct opposition to western man [sic] who is seen as the subject or carrier of a superior culture. Black and white also represent binary

opposites: this refers to the semiotics or signs within the theory of structuralism.

Some of the participants also refer to the role of their fathers. Tolletjie sums this up succinctly: “She (mother) was the opposite of my father. He was rough and insolent”. This is the law of the father within psychoanalytical theory. The softer mother ethos falls within feminist theory. However, it must be noted that some of the participants experience their fathers as being emotionally and physically present and not absent.

The participants emphasise that shared narrative establishes trust as it leads to the acceptance of the other across the deep racial divide. The subject only exists through the object; meaning is not only centred in the sender but in the receiver: “I am because of you”, which is part of the ubuntu language. The importance of the subject/object duality within discourse falls within poststructuralist theory.

Ubuntu language’s insistence on the egalitarian circle of communication also refers to the *Mandala*, the “magic circle” or “psychological view-finder”, which is the psychic instrument of centring the individual within a chaotic cosmos, according to Carl Gustav Jung’s psychoanalytical theory. This symbol of centring is universal, and is found in the indigenous South African cosmology.

Crucially, the eating together motif mentioned by Kobus dispels the abject. The abject refers to humankind’s innate rejection of the corpse

(both the festering corpse and abjected living body of the other who is considered as vile). The participants focus on the creation of a new body of ubuntu, which dispels the abject: equal bodies working together. The body should be the same: whether black or white. The French poststructuralist Julia Kristeva coined the theory of the abject.

The participants' reference to taking responsibility for their own lives is the existentialist concept of making sense of the world; the world does not have purpose or sense in itself.

Crucially, Ohrigstad's problems are a metaphor for the whole country's woes. The community narrative of hope is in direct contrast to the newspapers' and politicians' narratives of historical division, which is in itself also a binary opposite to the language of ubuntu.

Genis recognises Karien's observations about the "othering" of the unfamiliar as a corollary of the theory of structuralism. In Chapter Two, I described how a modernist compartmentalisation of society sustained discourses of race and otherness. However, the research conversations show that a postmodern, social construction discourse assists in dialogue with others, by the notion that knowledge is constructed socially. I agree with Genis' observation that ubuntu language of "I am because of you" is congruent with poststructuralist discourse in the sense that people exist through each other.

Genis remarks that the *Letsema* circle that enhanced ubuntu language in the group research conversation is a universal symbol of centring, and indigenous to South African cosmology. Interestingly, while I planned beforehand for the conversation to take place in a circle, the centring happened spontaneously -

the co-researchers arranged their own seating to be in a circle. This led to a spontaneous acknowledgement of one another by looking into each other's eyes and seeing humanness.

Genis states that the participants' reference to taking responsibility for their own lives indicates the existentialist concept of making sense of the world, which does not have purpose in itself. In the group conversation, participants did not make sense of the world individually, but through each other. Rev Siphso also believed that if the two churches reached out to each other, they could co-construct purpose, and bring a sense of hope and meaning to his community where hopelessness exists.

What would your major concern be if your discipline's perspective on the conversations might not be taken seriously?

Racism is deeply engrained within South African and world society. South Africa's past holds the key to bridging this racial divide. When we realise that we have suffered together, we can live together: the importance of history in building a united ubuntu narrative is crucial. You live through others if you read/share their troubled past. History and literature are crucial in healing the wounds of the past as they teach empathy. Today's insistence on science, technology and achievement (the A's obsession at schools) is relegating history and humanist literature to forgetfulness.

Gerhard Genis: 30 March 2016

In the research conversations, the broad historical context of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad was a continuous theme. Problem narratives such as

separate housing, the gap between rich and poor and separate languages were part of the co-researchers' accounts. It showed that these stories had to be told and retold without moving on too quickly.

8.3 Final remarks

At the end of the research journey, the following questions are reflected upon: how are the secondary and primary research questions addressed? In what way is the research valid? What are the possible contributions of the research? What possibilities are there for further research?

8.3.1 The research questions

Before discussing the primary research question, I address the secondary questions.

8.3.1.1 Questions regarding the theoretical framework

What difference can a postmodern worldview make where exclusion and distrust obstruct authentic relationships?

Being part of a minority group as a female minister in the DRC, I became aware of an environment where certain knowledge is taken more seriously than others. This stems from a modernist approach that views knowledge and truth as objective and exclusive. It disregards the significance of some cultures, and divides society in categories such as black and white, male and

female, rich and poor, and normal and abnormal. A postmodern perspective, from which I perceive the world around me, revises modernist assumptions of knowledge and truth: it approaches knowledge and truth as socially constituted through language.

This view on knowledge is helpful in research conversations about relationships. It can also assist the church in revealing how power discourses operate to marginalise sectors of a society. In recognising such discourses, people are more able to deconstruct oppressive stories that constitute their lives. To deconstruct is to identify problem narratives and then find alternative possibilities that we can live by.

An implication of a postmodern worldview is the social construction discourse, which derives meaning from community instead of individual control. It questions unethical discourses that exclude. It also emphasises human participation and regards the voices of marginalised people as vital in the construction of truth.

The research conversations between DRC and URCSA members in Ohrigstad were conducted in such a way that the participants were co-researchers. It meant that they co-constructed meaning together by telling their narratives. The co-researchers communally identified power discourses such as race and otherness, poverty, and language, which obstructed authentic relationships. In exploring these discourses - which are also present in the wider context of South Africa - the participants co-constructed alternative possibilities, which could be helpful in strengthening a mutual relationship.

Which possibilities does a postmodern practical theology present in discussions about stuck discourses?

A postmodern practical theology from a pastoral perspective wants to heal fragmentations caused by modernist systematisation. A modernist theology draws a clear distinction between religion and secular life, which causes church members to live compartmentalised lives. God, and speaking about God, is separate from more “worldly” matters. In this sense, religion does not make a difference in a person’s everyday life. In a postmodern practical and pastoral theology, everyday life becomes religious life. A spirituality of wholeness integrates God with the narratives of our lives. This facilitates a *prophetic* theological stance, where the church moves away from an inwardly focused position. In a postmodern prophetic theology, God is present in our world and our relationships, which places the focus on being accountable for the lives of human beings and relationships within our context. It generates a sensitivity to the consequences of theological perspectives and practices on people. A postmodern, prophetic approach wants to heal the divide between subject and object in contemplating ethical decisions within a community.

In the research conversations in Ohrigstad, God was not explicitly brought into the conversations, because God is not perceived as separate from our experiences. God’s presence was assumed in sharing everyday narratives. In the group discussion, the experience of God’s presence created a prophetic attitude which enabled the co-researchers to respect each other, to listen closely, and to take responsibility for building trust and healing unethical discourses in the community.

Participants’ local knowledge was vital because we came to know God in relationships. The participants became a community of knowledge who constructed meaning together within a specific *context*. The context was

Ohrigstad, a rural town, embedded in South Africa, with unique challenges. The co-researchers' experiences of this context differ: the villages where the URCSA members live differ from the farms and town where DRC members live. The participants took time to listen to each other's contexts and day-to-day struggles while each gave a voice to their experiences. This invoked a sensitivity towards the different contexts.

Within a postmodern practical theology human participation in conducting meaning is important, especially in pastoral care and research. God's will is not, as within a modernist theology, predetermined, and humans the passive role players. Humans are co-creators, and it is vital to listen to those who are marginalised by power discourses in religion. In this research, the subject-object relationship between researcher and participants were deconstructed. Participants were included as co-researchers in a *narrative research practice*.

Narrative research is not about stories only - we live by the stories we tell about our lives. Our narratives constitute meaning of our experiences. Narrative research leads to the question of how the story could develop differently. The perennial danger is to listen and to understand too quickly, and that is why the co-researchers and I listened with care, and listened again, searching, without trying to generalise (Müller 2009:20, 21). The data was field notes of the co-constructed knowledge, and transcripts of the stories shared. The inclusive narrative research conversations helped the members of the DRC and URCSA to deconstruct distrust and discovering new possibilities.

Because meaning is socially constructed, intercultural dialogue was possible. In the research conversations, white and black participants listened carefully while sharing their narratives, and constructed new understanding together.

Interdisciplinary dialogue between practical theology and other disciplines is also possible. In a postmodern context, we know that worldviews and scientific insights, even postmodern thought itself, are temporary until better insights are found. Both practical theology and other disciplines are socially constructed and on equal footing, which brings about the possibility that they can enrich each other in dialogue. It provides an opportunity for the church to enter into public debate without overestimating its own field of knowledge. This research was enriched by interdisciplinary dialogue with a scholar in the field of history and language.

Can ubuntu language be a discourse that provide new possibilities?

In the research, the meaning of ubuntu and its possibilities were explored through a literature study, in order to recognise its presence and effects in the research conversations.

Ubuntu language is a discourse that describes being human in an actual context and in relation with people and communities. It has a constitutive effect on people's lives. As a discourse, it is not a universal "truth out there"; it has many truths in different contexts. It is not superior or inferior to other discourses, but it is helpful for our understanding of others and ourselves. It describes a shared way of life in opposition to a compartmentalised, individualistic approach. In the same way that a social construction discourse challenges the view that human beings are separate and autonomous, ubuntu language as discourse emphasises human experience within a context: all humans and the cosmos are intrinsically linked. Regarding ubuntu ethics, relational qualities are important: as with a postmodern, prophetic stance to theology, moral agency is realised in the community and in everyday life.

Ubuntu language as discourse can become harmful when it is absolutised, when people take ubuntu language out of its context as a “truth” that has to be protected and obtained. *Restorative nostalgia* describes this idealism of past tradition, which can make it difficult to adapt to the challenges of an evolving world. The consequence can be that ubuntu language can be interpreted in a narrow nationalistic and ethnic way.

In contrast, when ubuntu language is described by a *reflective nostalgia*, traditional discourses are sensitively viewed in terms of its history and its evolving future. It means that human beings are not in a static state - they are *being becoming* (Hankela 2012:47). An example in this study was Sam: by joining the white, local rugby team in Ohrigstad as a black man, he had to find aspects of his own background, and shape it into a new story of becoming. In doing this, he brought a process of *being becoming* within the white rugby team into motion. Ubuntu language as reflective nostalgia is able to come into dialogue with other discourses. Viewed as such, ubuntu language can have a number of possibilities for conversations about bridging gaps between DRC and URCSA members in Ohrigstad:

As a process of mutual enrichment between the energy of individuals, it releases vitality and creativity in a community. It constitutes human identity and dignity, which are recognised through relationships with other humans and creation. This brings forth solidarity and humanity where a person learns to be human in compassionate relationships and mutual helpfulness. The sense that every person is related to one another widens the community, where others are included into the community in all their difference. Ubuntu language, interpreted as reflective nostalgia enhances individual responsibility. It does not view a human being as passively dictated to by tradition. Personal identity is not taken away - it comes to the fore in a person’s interaction, and taking responsibility within the community.

Christianity is a discourse that has much in common with ubuntu language in the notions of neighbourliness, caring for the poor and hospitality. This made for a comfortable flow in the research conversations between Christian- and ubuntu languages. A Christian morality that has been influenced by a modernist rationality and compartmentalisation was also enriched by the socially accountable morality of ubuntu language.

8.3.1.2 Research questions regarding the context

What is the broad historical context in which the DRC and URCSA of Ohrigstad find itself?

The history of the DRC and URCSA is closely linked to the history of South Africa, in which the discourse of apartheid overshadowed the possibilities of ubuntu language. The DRC and her daughter churches gave gone their separate ways since 1857. There were prominent discourses in the DRC that made exclusion because of race possible. The DRC's theological justification and sanctioning of apartheid went hand in hand with discourses of race and cultural hegemony.

In the history of apartheid, alternative voices of protest came from outside and from within the DRC. Contextual and liberation theology grew in resistance politics, and ubuntu language of solidarity played a role in the prophetic stance of siding with the poor and marginalised. In the late 1970's, the political scene in South Africa was turbulent, and the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (predecessor of URCSA) published several documents and letters to encourage the DRC to renounce apartheid. In 1982, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church formulated the *Belhar Confession*, which stated that forced separation by the colour of one's skin is a sin; that God is in a special way the

God of the destitute and poor; and that the church must take action against justice by walking with the marginalised. For the DRC, the condemnation of the status quo was initially unacceptable, but changes started to occur. In the document *Church and Society* (1986), the DRC changed its viewpoint in stating that racism was a sin and could not be defended. This document was refined in 1990, when the system of apartheid was rejected as a sin and a heresy.

A new era was inaugurated with democracy in South Africa in 1994. In the time immediately after, ubuntu language of solidarity and humanity called for a peaceful transition. Narrative-as-identity came to the fore in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which created new meaning in a previously fractured community by letting perpetrators and victims of apartheid share their narratives. Many South Africans realised their complicity in the past, providing the nation with the opportunity to share in one another's stories and consequently in one another's humanity.

Today, there are huge challenges facing South Africa, the biggest arguably the wide gap between rich and poor. In the narratives of the research participants it became evident how these challenges play out in the Ohrigstad community: the new political and economic elite, who embraced the bureaucratic culture that was inherited by apartheid, hold on to their power positions and money to the detriment of the poor in the villages. The previously privileged who are longing for the past, are struggling to co-operate with black people on equal terms, in the community as well as in the church. The marginalised who accept that their expectations will not be met, are struggling to make a living - they still live in separate villages that are lacking amenities. The marginalised who are frustrated and angry make for the increase of crime. However, there those who are committed to being agents of change - South Africans who exemplify the possibilities of ubuntu language.

They are the participants in the group discussion between URCSA and the DRC.

In the present context of the DRC and URCSA, a process has been started within the DRC to accept the Belhar Confession as part of its body of confessions. It is important for uniting the two churches, because it constitutes an integral part of URCSA's confessions. Accepting the confession will also indicate that the DRC has parted with its apartheid past. The process has so far not been successful, and it maybe shows that many DRC congregations are still influenced by a theology that is "above" the context.

What do individual narrative conversations with members of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad reveal about their current history?

In the narrative research conversations with members of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad, participants interpreted the current history of their relationship. They told a story of a longstanding relationship; an attempt at church unity; and of turning away from each other. In their narratives, the presence of ubuntu language offered hope for revitalising the relationship again.

In the conversations, it was clear that the participants were experts on their own relationships which dated years back - before I was born! I respected that. Some of the older co-researchers shared narratives of trusting relationships between farmworkers and farmers that showed respect, solidarity and humanity during the times of apartheid. The widening of community took place when URCSA and the DRC worked together on outreach projects. In working together, they shaped each other's identities by sharing their stories with each other. One participant remembered how he

learnt ubuntu language of solidarity from the minister of URCSA's solidarity with suffering congregants.

The relationship of the two congregations was strengthened, and even greater efforts for understanding and co-operation were made. The *Joint Witness Forum* was created in order to co-ordinate community projects and to discuss church unity. Members of the forum displayed mutual trust, and they were willing to work on obstacles in the way of church unity.

Unfortunately, some years later, the community projects were still running, but a conservative faction in the DRC undermined the decision to unite the two churches. This faction grew stronger by reviving other members' old fears in terms of current threats to their language, culture, property and funds. The relationship of trust declined, and the narratives of participants portrayed sadness, despair, disappointment and frustration.

The narratives of URCSA members depicted scepticism because of the lukewarm reception they received from the DRC. In URCSA participants' accounts, it was clear they experienced an unspoken discourse of racism which excluded black culture.

From DRC participants' narratives, two different sentiments occurred: one sentiment was from co-researchers who were disappointed in their congregation taking an inward stance. They perceived that members of their congregation were protecting their "own", and were willing to fight to retain their traditions. The co-researchers who wanted to widen their community, were pushed aside by the conservative faction - their voices were marginalised and even silenced by leaders in the congregation. This caused frustration and despair. These co-researchers are those whose attention is

directed to the social and moral issues in the community. They and the URCSA participants are influenced by a prophetic, contextual theology that takes note of the struggles in the community, especially the marginalised. Ubuntu language as reflective nostalgia opens up their worlds in interaction with other cultures.

Another view emanated from the conservative side in the DRC. The narrative of one of their key role-players showed a worldview which excludes and distrusts other cultures. A theology of exclusion divides people between black and white, and religion is a private matter that is kept separate from the world. God's work is regarded as saving souls for the hereafter, and it is hindered when one starts meddling with things such as church unity. Restorative nostalgia makes for a desire to preserve the Afrikaner culture in the church. The historical belief that separate identities are important for the survival of Western civilisation, and the Afrikaner culture as guardian and educator of other cultures, are prevalent within this group.

It is regretful that the relationship between URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad turned in this direction; that the conflict in the DRC because of church unity persists. The consequences may be disheartening. One example was how the giving of money and resources to the poor and marginalised in Ohrigstad was sometimes perceived as a paternalistic gesture because it seemed to be lacking a trusting relationship and ubuntu language of solidarity.

However, the participants' narratives were never without hope: ubuntu language was still present in ongoing connections between URCSA and DRC members, though not formally. There were accounts of the two church's women's ministries that spoke ubuntu language of identity by learning from one another. Ubuntu language of solidarity surfaced in the caring for the poor

without it being experienced as paternalistic. The URCSA pastor still felt the need to widen the community - he stated that DRC members would always be welcome in his congregation.

8.3.1.3 Primary research question

Against the background of the secondary questions, the primary research question may now be properly addressed:

Can ubuntu language bridge gaps in a narrative group discussion between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad?

While co-constructing meaning, the research participants experienced how ubuntu language as discovering identity, humanity and solidarity, widening community and taking responsibility, led to the bridging of gaps.

In the group discussion between DRC and URCSA members of Ohrigstad, the participants were the experts on their own experiences. With the assumption of intersubjectivity between researcher and participants, the participants' local knowledge was sourced.

In the conversation, ubuntu was the dominant language used. The co-researchers and I implemented Mamphela Ramphela's *Letsema Circle Healing Approach*, with the understanding that for people to walk together, they first need to sit down and talk. The circle included everybody and made eye contact possible, which is essential for ubuntu language: "I am because you are". At the start of the conversations, the participants greeted each other with stories about their parents, while the others listened attentively and asked

questions. In sharing my own narrative, I temporarily became part of the group. Telling our stories, set the tone for narrative enquiry. It also set the tone for ubuntu language, in that we could experience each other's humanness and connect with it. We acknowledged our differences while we discovered commonalities in the way we were brought up - with respect for human beings; a prophetic stance regarding religion where doing right is more important than being right; and social accountability with an awareness of injustice.

Ramphele's healing circle was helpful in weaving personal experiences into stories of how those in the circle regarded the relationship between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. It created an imagined space for new possibilities to occur.

In sharing narratives in the circle, ubuntu language entailed more than just conversation: it materialised in the way we recognised each other's narratives on the one hand, but it was also constituted through our narratives. Ubuntu language provided a safe space to deal with issues such as exclusion and hopelessness. It helped us moving forward in displaying new possibilities:

Discovering identity: The participants shared narratives in which they discovered their own identity in friendships across race barriers, and they realised that reaching out might accord dignity to people without hope. By co-constructing meaning in the group, participants discovered subjugated aspects of their own identities. Through listening to accounts from the respective communities in Ohrigstad, for example Siphon telling about hopelessness in his community, the participants' eyes were opened for the humanness of those people.

Unleashing potential: Narratives of hopelessness can take away vitality and creativity. When Siphso started talking about his community's hardships, we recognised the burden on his shoulders. However, by being able to share it with the group, he was revitalised. Conversely, the group discussion empowered some of the DRC participants who felt overcome by an overpowering race discourse in their community. Ubuntu language unleashed potential in the group by the unique outcomes that emerged in sharing our stories.

Widening community: By practicing ubuntu language in the group, participants could discuss obstacles in the way of a healthy, inclusive community. They could utilise their own knowledge to deal with it.

Solidarity and humanity: Ubuntu language came to the fore in a deep compassion for each other and the community. Participants realised that when the community suffered, all suffered - if URCSA suffered, the DRC suffered.

Taking responsibility: Time, exhaustion, lack of planning, transport, politics, languor and selfishness were some of the obstacles the group identified as standing in the way of taking responsibility. However, in sharing alternative narratives, ubuntu language brought forth resilient hope, which transformed in taking responsibility on a practical level. One DRC participant took responsibility in the form of an apology to the pastor of URCSA for an estranged relationship.

Ubuntu language and Christianity: Ubuntu language and the values of the Christian Bible offered a shared language in the group discussion. Constructing meaning together in the group, brought honesty and solidarity instead of cheap reconciliation; it caused participants to realise they were

agents of change in the church; it made repentance and forgiveness possible; it created space to move beyond differences; and in becoming aware of suffering and injustices, there was a turn away from self-preservation.

In the group discussion, **subjugating discourses** were identified and deconstructed. A discourse of *race and otherness* was deconstructed by telling narratives of their parents. This created space to move from self to other, and to learn from one another. A discourse of *poverty* was identified when Siphon told about the negative spiral it created in his community. Ubuntu language in the group showed that mutual relationships of solidarity and friendship could be a starting point to deconstruct narratives of shame and paternalism regarding rich and poor. Ubuntu language created a safe space in the group to talk about a discourse of *language that excludes*. Alternative narratives were shared of other instances where language was not a problem. This rendered the group to look differently at language barriers. Whether Afrikaans, English or Sepedi were used, the operative language of every participant was that of ubuntu.

8.3.2 Validity of the research

In this research, I explained narratives, and the meaning of these narratives as co-constructed by participants and by myself as researcher. Questions I reflected on throughout my research were:

8.3.2.1 Do the narrative research conversations point beyond the local?

To address this question, I relied much on Sheila Trahar's work on methodology in narrative research. She states that narrative, qualitative research explores what things exist, instead of how many things are there (Trahar 2011:40). This research investigated what members of URCSA and the DRC were doing and experiencing; what the research participants were doing and experiencing; and the meanings constructed.

The research does not make generalised claims, but rather provides stories of a specific relationship (Trahar 2011:45). At the same time, these stories do not only tell about a person's experience - there are larger contexts and discourses that form a person's experiences and the interpretations thereof. In this instance, there is a history in South Africa, a history in the DRC and URCSA, and a history within Ohrigstad. Therefore, the narratives of participants give us a glimpse on the larger social context in which we live. Trahar (2011:45) argues: "Stories do not fall from the sky (or innermost self), they are composed and received in contexts - interactional, historical, institutional and discursive". That means that the narratives co-researchers shared, were not only their narratives - they inform us of a broader context, and how our understanding is shaped by the discourses in that context. To witness the participants' experiences, was to perceive it wider than just a personal account (Trahar 2011:46), because there are generations of stories behind what was told.

8.3.2.2 Are the narratives in this study valid descriptions of what the participants said?

In the research, I could only describe experiences that I was conscious of. However, I attempted to come to a thorough understanding of participants' experiences by being in a not-knowing position, in which they were the experts. I did not force my viewpoint, because their local knowledge was essential. I informed them of this beforehand, and it encouraged the participants to help me understand. Where there were words or phrases that I was unsure of, I asked again, going back to what was said. I often asked the participants to elaborate on something that was not clear to me. In this collaborative setting, the participants were aware that they were co-researchers and that they and I were searching for meaning together. I gave them the transcripts of our conversations, so that they could add to, or change what was said.

8.3.2.3 Was intercultural dialogue possible in the research conversations?

When I started the research, I was anxious because not only was my own background different from the black participants in the research - it was also different from the white participants. My background is from an urban context with little experience of a rural town like Ohrigstad and of living on a farm. I wondered if I was the right person to conduct the research conversations. I realised afterwards that there was no need to be nervous - just for being cautious and sensitive.

I knew I could not negate my own background, but I celebrated the participants' and mine in mutual enrichment (Trahar 2011:40). Ubuntu language and social construction made it possible for the participants and me to conduct the research as co-researchers and constituting meaning together. It made space for dialogue. I became part of the "landscape" by telling about my own position, especially when I participated as we shared narratives about our parents in the group discussion (Trahar 2011:51).

Understanding my background as constituted by different discourses helped me to identify my own perceptions of the truth, and seeing others' perspectives more clearly (Trahar 2001:42). In the group discussion, it was important not to oversimplify by just focusing on sameness between participants of the two churches. The participants listened attentively to each unique narrative, and asked questions in order to have a deeper understanding. It led us being able to "imagine a world other than the one we knew" (Trahar 2011:48).

8.3.3 Contribution of the research

8.3.3.1 Relevance and contribution

It is important to note that narrative research within a pastoral, practical theological framework is more concerned with finding new possibilities than to prove a theory. In this research the possibilities of ubuntu language in bridging gaps as described in Chapter Seven were: discovering identity, unleashing potential, widening community, solidarity and humanity and taking responsibility. The narrative process opened up possibilities for deconstructing harmful discourses such as race and otherness, the gap between rich and poor, and language. It is also important to recognise that these possibilities are open-ended, as Gerkin states: "the process of practical theological

thinking is a never-ending one. Our human situation is an ever-unfolding one. It is in the midst of this story set in time that we discover the unfolding of the story of God” (1986:74).

In the historical overview in previous chapters, as well as in the interdisciplinary dialogue with Gerrit Genis, it became clear that the lack of trust and misunderstanding across racial divide in Ohrigstad derives from the scars inflicted by apartheid. Genis argues that Ohrigstad represents a microcosm for South African society, and the DRC and URCSA’s problem discourses are a metaphor for the whole country’s woes.

In the South African context, the question of racism is prevalent as ever. Discussions in the media, racist remarks by individuals in social media, events on campuses and the political discourse in an election year show signs of a fractured society. Numerous projects are being launched in order to address the problem of racism. For the church, it is important to address the discourse of racism on grass roots level if it wants to be part of the solution. The DRC and URCSA represent all races, and have the potential to play a significant role in confronting these issues.

In the research, unique conversations were documented of narratives and of local knowledge that described the local history of the relationship between DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad. These research conversations point beyond the local, in that it is embedded within the broader discourse of the two churches, and of South African society.

The relationship between the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad has often been dominated by the question of the “haves” and the “have-nots”. One-sided financial aid without a relationship of trust caused feelings of inferiority with

those who are economically challenged (the have-nots). It often caused the erroneous perception among those who are economically sound (the haves), that ubuntu eventually means that one has to part with one's total livelihood.

The research conversations, on the contrary, demonstrated how ubuntu language between members of the DRC and URCSA in Ohrigstad led to a deeper relationship of respect, solidarity and responsibility. Ubuntu language showed the co-researchers how friendship and recognising each other's humanness gave new meaning to giving and receiving.

In South Africa, cultural diversity is celebrated - but it is often a source of division. The language barrier between URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad shows how people utilise their language to protect their own and exclude other cultures. In this research, ubuntu language between the participants provided a new language of understanding, which transcended the bickering over which language to use.

In the research, the co-researchers and I have discovered how sharing narratives, discovering identity through ubuntu language, and employing the local knowledge of ordinary church members, constructed alternative possibilities.

The possibilities of narrative conversations are illustrated in deconstructing harmful discourses, which can be applied in relationships on ground level, but also in the wider circles of church and society when socio-political issues are deliberated. According to Müller (2009:23), the church's task is to assist people, rich and poor, to become whole human beings. The church has to play a role in the community in communicating with poor and marginalised

people as fellow human beings who are respected and who can give and receive.

The church does not always have the potential to change political structures, but it has the potential to use alternative language, which can open up alternative possibilities. With the language of inclusion and respect, the church can construct a new discourse wherein a hope-giving, reciprocal relationship between rich and poor can develop (Müller 2009:29). A church that is involved with marginalised people's stories also has the task to express a theological conviction about politics and the economy (Müller 2009:30). To participate in public conversation, the church can help to better the quality of life for the poor and marginalised. The church and theology can make people's narratives known in the public discourse (Van Niekerk 2009: 74), after which it has to go back to the marginalised to converse further about their stories. The implications of their narratives have to be thought through with them, in order to make plans (Van Niekerk 2009:79).

Most importantly in this study, the group discussion between co-researchers describes the valuable potential that the discourse of ubuntu language can offer in our search for meaningful ways of being together. Gerrit Genis states that this community narrative of hope is in direct contrast to the newspapers' and politicians' narratives of historical division. Although the problem of a fractured society runs deep and is situated in hegemonic structures, confronting the issues at grass roots level within the caring language of ubuntu, may instigate taking responsibility for one another and bridging gaps.

8.3.3.2 Scientific standard of the research

Studying recent and relevant sources, local as well as international, this study portrays the value of a postmodern worldview, a postmodern theology, ubuntu language and a narrative approach for scientific research - as well as for the church in confronting power discourses. In describing the historical context, the church's own documents were utilised, as well as the most recent synodical reviews and minutes.

Unique conversations with different voices were documented, which included those voices that would not otherwise be heard in public. This is important for future research.

The research was conducted in an ethical way by attaining the co-researchers' consent to publish their accounts. The participants were aware that the relationship between them and the researcher was not that of subject/object, but that of co-researchers who constituted meaning together. They read the transcripts of the conversations, and reflected on it. I tested the validity of the research according to well-known narrative researchers.

8.3.3.3 Research method

The research utilised a narrative research method in which the narratives of co-researchers were interwoven with the theoretical framework that was presented. In the narrative research conversations, God was implied within

the narratives of the co-researchers and in their understanding of their situation - as well as in their search for meaning. This reminds of the Christian Bible where God is present, and meaning is constructed within the narratives of people.

8.3.4 Possibilities for further research

This research took place in a rural context of South Africa, but it would be interesting to study the same process in an urban context, to explore how narrative research conversations between members of URCSA and the DRC in one of the cities of South Africa would depict ubuntu language.

The time limitation on the research, and the fact that I do not live nearby, restricted the amount of conversations I conducted. In the future, I would like to go back to Ohrigstad to explore further actions and developments.

I conducted this research with mostly willing participants who were positive about strengthening the relationship between the two churches. In future research, one can continue these conversations with the conservative group in the DRC, as well as with members of URCSA who might not feel the need for church unity.

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Addendum 1



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Practical Theology

7 June 2014

Conversations with church members of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in Ohrigstad

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking part in this discussion.

I am a PhD student in Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria. In my research, I want to investigate stories about understanding and misunderstanding between black and white church members in Ohrigstad. The aim is for people to read these stories, and maybe come to a better understanding of our context in rural South Africa.

By participating, your voice will be heard. You will not be a subject of the research, but a co-researcher. This means that you will be able to have a say in what will finally be written. It also means that, although I have knowledge about research, I will be the learner, and you the teacher.

It is important for you to feel safe in our conversations. I will handle your stories with the utmost respect. You must please inform me if you do not feel respected during our conversations, or if you feel uncomfortable. You are welcome to read the transcript of our conversation at the end, in order to correct, to add or to omit ideas until you are satisfied.

Regards,

Lieze Meiring.

Consent

Hereby I give my consent to participate in the conversations, and for my story to be recorded in the research. I will stop participating immediately if I feel uncomfortable or disrespected. I understand that I, as a co-researcher, can change my story at any time.

Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Town.....

Department
University of Pretoria
Pretoria 0020 South Africa

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Addendum 2



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
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Departement Practical Theology
Promotor: Prof JC Müller
Email: julian.muller@up.ac.za
Researcher: LF Meiring
Contact no: 083 324 8236
Email: lieze@skuilkrans.co.za

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PROPOSED RESEARCH WITH MEMBERS OF URCSA IN OHRIGSTAD (PhD):

- Title: *Exploring Ubuntu Language in bridging gaps - a pastoral narrative reflection on discussions between members of a black and white church in Ohrigstad*
- Aim: In the research I listen to stories of understanding and misunderstanding, trust and distrust, between members of URCSA and the DRC in Ohrigstad.
- Procedures: The research consists of narrative conversations with, and between, members of the respective churches. Participants are the co-researchers of the study.
- Risks: No risk to participants are foreseen.
- Benefits: No personal benefits for participants are offered. The findings of the research may enrich the participants' personal growth.
- Rights: Participation in this research is voluntary. Participants may use their personal names or pseudonyms. They may withdraw from this research at any stage without prejudice. Right of access to the research is stated.
- Confidentiality: The researcher undertakes to destroy the data if a participant withdraws from the study. The data gained will be processed and safeguarded. Participants will receive transcripts of the conversations and grant their permission for it to be published.

I, Rev Siphon Mokoena, hereby declare that the researcher thoroughly informed me of the research, that the research is conducted in my congregation with my full knowledge, and that the participants each gave their consent.

S Mokoena

Signed at _____ on this _____ day of _____ 20__

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Addendum 3

The Belhar Confession

[Note: The synod of the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) adopted the draft Confession of Belhar in 1982 with an accompanying letter. These two documents should always be read together. In 1986 the DRMC adopted the Confession of Belhar in its final version in Afrikaans. The 2008 General Synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), which resulted from the reunification between the former Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) and the DRMC, declared the 1986 Afrikaans version to be the original source document. The 2008 URCSA General Synod in addition adopted the English translation that follows here as the official English version.]

1. We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who through Word and Spirit gathers, protects and cares for the church from the beginning of the world and will do to the end.
2. We believe in one holy, universal Christian Church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;

Eph. 2:11-22

that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;

Eph. 4:1-16

that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted;

John 17:20-23

that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another;

Philem. 2:1-5
1 Cor. 12:4-31

that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptised with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one Name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against everything that may threaten or hinder this unity;

John 13:1-17
1 Cor. 1:10-13
Eph. 4:1-6
Eph. 3:14-20
1 Cor. 10:16-17
1 Cor. 11:17-34
Gal. 6:2
2 Cor. 1:3-4

that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the diversity of languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;

that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church;

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

which absolutises either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutisation hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;

which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace whilst believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;

which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;

which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

3. We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.

that God's life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity; that God's life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;

that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity; that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Romans 12:3-8
1 Cor. 12:1-11
Eph. 4:7-13
Gal. 3:27-28
James 2:1-13

2 Cor. 5:17-21
Matt. 5:13-16
Matt. 5:9
2 Peter 3:13
Rev. 21-22

Eph. 4:17 – 6:23
Romans 6
Col. 1:9-14
Col. 2:13-19
Col 3:1 – 4:6

Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

4. We believe that God has revealed Godself as the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace on earth; that in a world full of injustice and enmity God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that God calls the church to follow in this; that God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind; that God supports the downtrodden, protects the strangers, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly; that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering; that God wishes to teach the people of God to do what is good and to seek the right;

Deut. 32:4
Luke 2:14
John 14:27
Eph. 2:14
Isaiah 1:16-17
James 1:27
James 5:1-6
Luke 1:46-55
Luke 6:20-26
Luke 7:22
Luke 16:19-31

that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;

Psalm 146
Luke 4:16-19
Romans 6:13-18
Amos 5

that the church belonging to God, should stand where God stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

5. We believe that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only Head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

Eph. 4:15-16
Acts 5:29-33
1 Peter 2:18-25
1 Peter 3:15-18

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honour and the glory for ever and ever.

(<http://www.vgksa.org.za/documents/The%20Belhar%20Confession.pdf>: Accessed 19 October 2015)

Addendum 4

The Ohrigstad-story

A meeting organised by the “Joint Witness Forum”, 11 March 2006

The Joint Witness Forum is a body that was created by the two churches, Uniting Reformed Church (Black group) and the Dutch Reformed Church (White group) to initiate discussions and cooperation on local projects.

The weekend workshop at Ohrigstad²⁰, a small town in the northeast of South Africa, was an initiative of this forum and the two local congregations of the two Churches were invited to send representatives to participate in the discussions.

Participants

Julian Müller	DRC (Facilitator)
Dory Burger	DRC
Jan Els	DRC
Lenie Els	DRC
Toekie Doyer	DRC
Dirkie Bekker	DRC

²⁰ Ohrigstad is situated about 350 km east from Pretoria in a very rural area. It is a small town with an adjacent black township. It is situated in a valley where in earlier years there has been a flourishing tobacco farming industry. In later years they had to stop the tobacco farming because of too high chlorine content. Farmers had to switch to other crops and that led to a process of impoverishment for both white and black, but this had affected the black workers more negatively.

Sipho Mokoena	URCSA (Pastor)
Ephraim Mnisi	URCSA
Elsie Mogane	URCSA
Mike Heaney	DRC (Pastor from Joint Witness Forum)
Anton Doyer	DRC (Pastor)
Lieze Meiring	DRC (PhD-student)
Zirkia Müller	DRC (Julian's wife)

From the white side, the participants were mostly farmers. From the black side the local pastor came with two members of his congregation who are labourers and who live in the township.

I (Julian Müller) was asked to facilitate the discussion and my wife and I went from Pretoria and spent the weekend at Ohrigstad where I was assigned to lead the workshop on the Saturday and to preach in the worship service of the DRC on the Sunday. The URCSA participants also attended this service.

Afterwards I was asked by the organizers to write a report. After listening again to the tapes, I have formulated my reflections and that was affirmed by at least 4 of the participants with whom I could share it.

The structure and assembly of the workshop

The workshop was conducted on the basis of three sessions, with a number of questions/steps in each session:

First Session:

1. Let us share something about ourselves and why we are participating.
2. Share with each other stories about an incident or situation when you have felt good about being a South African.
3. Let us now reflect on what we have done thus far.

Second Session:

1. What are keeping us back from achieving more in the healing of our relationships?
2. We reflect on the story of Joseph and his reconciliation with his brothers in Genesis 45.
3. Joseph said to them: “You sold me...”. Let us share with each other some of our experiences when we have felt being sold out within the Dutch Reformed Family²¹.
4. Let us now reflect on what we have done thus far.

Third Session:

²¹ “Family of Dutch Reformed Churches” is a well-known concept in South Africa. It refers to the so-called mother church, the white Dutch Reformed Church, with the three so-called daughter churches, which originated out of the mission work of the DRC, namely the Uniting Reformed Church (former coloured and black churches who became one church), the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (still existing black church who did not join the unification process), and the Reformed Church in Africa (mainly Indian).

1. We reflect on the bridging of gaps in Genesis 45 in contrast with the creation of gaps in the early part of the same story, Genesis 37. We think about the symbols of reconciliation in the Joseph-story and imagine what such symbols could look like for us in South Africa? What can we regard as signals and symbols of change taking place in our situation?
2. How can the reconciliation be made visible in our everyday lives?
3. Let us now reflect on our experiences of the day.

Reflection

For this reflection, I relied on three sources:

1. The written reflection and the report to the organizers, which I had to write one week after the workshop.
2. The recordings that was made and to which I have listened again after 6 years.
3. The memories and reflections of some of the other participants with whom I have had discussions afterwards.

Practical issues

- The venue was excellent. A *lapa* (outdoor meeting place) next to the church building of the DRC, Ohrigstad was used. The Logistics were well organised and the food was very good.
- The people from the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), Ohrigstad, arrived two hours late. It didn't create much

tension because the other participants knew beforehand that there was a funeral early on the Saturday morning, which the URCSA-members wanted to attend first. The tiredness of the black participants however was a reality, which did influence the discussions. It is customary in African culture that people participate in a vigil the night before a funeral. Nevertheless they came with a good attitude and were positive about their participation.

- There was an uneven representation with only three black people participating. In terms of church representation the picture looked a little better, because the white pastor, Anton Doyer and his wife, Toekie have been members of URCSA and they had worked for many years in a black church. Therefore they were able to identify with both contexts and in a sense also represented the black church.
- The language did not create tension, but it did create an imbalance. In rural areas like these the vernacular is normally Afrikaans and therefore that was the language with which the workshop was started. At the very beginning I asked the participants to decide what would be the best language and everyone agreed to use Afrikaans. The black people's use of Afrikaans was exceptionally good, but the fact is that for them it is a second or even third language in which they had to express themselves. In an urban context English would have been used, which would have created a more even situation where all participants would have used their second language.

Reflection on the content of the discussions.

A very good attitude with openness and friendliness prevailed throughout the discussions. It was clear that a lot of groundwork had been done and that

good relations between the participants had previously been established. Especially the good relationship of mutual trust that existed between the two leading pastors (Anton and Siphon) gave direction and security to all the others.

I share a number of observations and perhaps surprising discoveries.

1. The response to the question whether the participants think that they, with their positive attitudes and motivation for such talks, were representing the majority of their different groups, was contrasting. While the DRC participants stressed the point that they were exceptional in their community, the URCSA members were convinced that they, with their positive position and attitude, represented their community.

The DRC representatives took the opportunity to describe the racist and negative attitudes that prevail among their peers.

For me, this was a disappointing experience. I could not believe that they would share these things in a mixed group like this. On the other hand, I appreciated the honesty. What was even more surprising was that the black people did not appear very shocked. I suppose they were aware of these attitudes towards them and even used to them.

The Rev Anton Doyer then tried to rescue the situation by drawing a distinction between the white community in general and the faith community. He agreed that there was much negativity among whites in general, but in his congregation things were different. But one of his elders in the group differed from him and elaborated about negative attitudes even among churchgoers. One of the other white participants

tried to soften the negative message a little by stressing that things were changing...

2. On the question, "What keeps us apart and restrain us in making progress towards church unity?", the responses were also contrasting. From the DRC side the opinion was raised that people simply did not need further unity. They did not want their comfort zones to be disturbed and they were not motivated for the difficult exercise of unification.

There was also a fear on the white side for losing control. The farmers were also afraid that they would lose their farms and it sounded as if they did not distinguish between such political issues and the church. The political issues and arguments were used as an argument against change in the Church.

From URCSA's side the emphasis was put on the low self-esteem of black people. They could not imagine themselves as equal with the privileged of society. The Rev Siphon pointed out that between 60% and 70% of his people were unemployed. And then there was the issue of HIV and Aids. In conversations like these, the issue of HIV and Aids were always looming in the shadows. Aids was never mentioned specifically, but from the information given about the young man who was buried that morning, and the fact that the cause of death was never mentioned, one can make the assumption that he died of an Aids-related illness.

These were some of the factors that created demotivated people who understandably were not really interested in luxuries like discussions

with whites, who in any case were seemingly not positive about the transformation of the community.

3. One of the most surprising moments occurred towards the end of the discussions (second session), when the participants were asked to share negative memories and to voice their frustrations and disappointments. In spite of the fact that at that stage of the discussions an open and trustful situation had developed, the opportunity was not taken. The “speaking of the truth” part of the TRC, which the organizers of the discussions regarded as so important, and which I as the facilitator shared with them, did not (could not?) occur.

Even when the DRC delegates put issues of little contact between the communities and the problems around the acceptance of the Belhar Confession²² on the table, the response remained the same. Rev Siphon emphatically stated that he is voicing the meaning of the majority of his people and that they feel Belhar is just a document and should not stand between us. According to him, it is more important what goes on in people’s hearts than just to accept or not accept a “document”. The other black participants supported him in his position.

²² Before the unification between the Mission Church (Coloured) and the Reformed Church in Africa (Black), the Mission Church declared a *Status Confesiones* and accepted the Belhar Confession. It is called Belhar, because that was the venue where the synod took place. Since then the Confession of Belhar took a centre position on the agenda whenever there were talks about unification. From URCSA’s side there is normally the expectation that the DRC should, by accepting Belhar, show their remorse and identify with those who have suffered under apartheid. From the DRC side, especially from the more conservative members, there used to be and still is a reaction of rejection. Belhar is seen by them as a political instrument.

Conclusion

- One may conclude that in this rural community there is an attitude of reconciliation and a willingness to put stumbling blocks aside in order to grow towards the healing of society. All expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to be part of the discussion and their expectations about the positive outcome of the meeting. From both sides the importance of reconciliation and unity is stressed.
- One of the white participants said that by sharing with each other the positive developments that were occurring, there was at the same time a painful realization that mistakes have been made and therefore a feeling of shame.
- The positive things that we shared were valuable, but it is a pity that so many of our ordinary church members were not interested in a discussion like this.
- A few people stressed the prophetic task of the church to work against political discourses. The question is how the church would be able to deconstruct the stereotypes about other people and groups? A member answered: Through getting to know each other. The female participants felt that they as women had made more progress towards change and transformation. They felt that in this community they took the lead.
- The participants then were invited to share small signs or symbols of change in our society.
 - Anton told the story of a visit by a group from his previous congregation (brown people) to his current white church and the effect it had on them.
 - The day's meeting was also mentioned as a small sign of a different story.

- There were existing projects where the white congregation provided food and other necessities for the poor in the black community. The need for such gifts to be accompanied by people with friendly faces was stressed in the group. There should also be an awareness that assistance given with good intentions can have a patronizing meaning on the other side. The challenge would also be to work against a one-way movement and to create a reciprocal situation where there is a realization of sacrifices and benefits on both sides. The aim should be the promotion of human dignity and not only the provision of sources.

Reflection from the perspective of Ritual-space, Forgiveness and Reconciliation (Cas Wepener and Julian Müller).

1. We wonder what the effect on the whole process would have been if the venue was not the *lapa* next to the white church building, but in a real *lapa* (word for a meeting place in the back yard) in the township? We need to consider the effect of space where the workshop was conducted and the meaning attached to that. What kind of ritualistic meaning was involved for the few black people to go and attend a meeting with the whites on their turf? What would have been the effect on the white delegates if they had to participate in a situation where they feel uncertain and without power?
2. What was the effect of the sharing of a meal at lunchtime on the Saturday? The discussion about telling the past (truth) and the role

which Belhar should play in the process of healing, was conducted in the afternoon after lunch. Is it perhaps possible that the meal, without the intention of the organizers, had a quasi-healing effect; that it functioned like a sacrament which made it difficult to voice any anger afterwards? Or should it be understood more positively in the sense that the meal as such constituted an attitude of reconciliation and made talks about forgiveness unnecessary?

3. It is interesting that the concept of forgiveness never featured in the discussions. Should the black pastor and his people's willingness to put the Confession of Belhar aside and focus on "what is in the heart", perhaps be interpreted as a sign that they have forgiven the whites for what was done to them?
4. The need for telling the truth and for restitution seemed to be more urgent on the white side, while on the black side there is a need to have an internal healing (in the heart) and to move forward towards better relations. Can it be that forgiveness is given but not taken?
5. The liturgical space of the Sunday morning service was supposed to be used to create a celebration of the unity of all believers. One wonders what the experience of this ritual was on the participants? What was the experience of the insiders, those who participated in the workshop and what was the experience of the outsiders, those who could not or did not want to participate? And most important of all, what was the experience of the few black people who came to attend the predominantly white worship service?

Addendum 5

