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Cuts and wounds: Stories of perpetual loss and insecurity

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A quest to find home: The journey of the displaced and violated.

Because of a people, because of others other people who came breaking the string for me, the earth is not the earth this place is a place now changed for me.

Because the string is broken, the country feels as if it lay empty before me, our country seems as if it lay both empty before me, and dead before me.

Because of this string, because of a people breaking the string, this earth, my place is the place of something – a thing broken – that does not stop wounding, breaking within me.

(Song of the broken string, by Xaa-ttin)¹

1 Introduction

Through violent invasion, genocide, colonisation and oppression, the string that had held the familiar world of the violated, colonised and vanquished together is broken. It is a blow to the tissues of the body as well as the structures of the mind. Being uprooted is not only about the literal loss of a physical home; it also implies being lost within oneself: If I cannot locate myself physically, I also no longer know who I am.² The loss of spiritual and cultural safety is catastrophic and the void can endure over many generations. When the complex webs that have held communities together are broken, the capacity is also lost to mediate and negotiate relationships and responsibilities, to hold the intricate social system together or maintain a sense of self and self-worth. The displaced,

1 In M Adhikari *The anatomy of a South African genocide: The extermination of the Cape San peoples* 95.

2 JP Lederach & AJ Lederach *When blood and bones cry out: Journeys through the soundscape of healing and reconciliation* (2010).

thereby, is forced to undertake a perennial journey of searching to locate the self in an unknown social landscape, as individuals and as a collective. It is the end of a known world, and no new world can be envisioned. Herman describes this as the obliteration of both the past and future, which dooms the wounded to an 'endless present'.³

In the case of protracted oppression, the oppressor deliberately keeps the oppressed in a disrupted, deprived and inferior state. This is accomplished through a complex range of strategies and laws to restrict access to educational and economic opportunities and to enforce spatial and social separation. Repeated uprooting, forced removals and uncertainty result in the recurrent loss of physical and intellectual assets, which contributes significantly to the perpetuation and augmentation of inequality. If this continues over generations, the image of inferiority, forced upon the oppressed by the oppressor, becomes internalised. It becomes impossibly difficult to feel 'at home' again, to situate the self in a location or to weave new stories and connections. It is not only the past that is cut off; the future is also lost. This increases the risk of psychological and social distress.⁴

Authors on liberation struggles note that the subtlety and tenacity of communal wounding are seldom recognised by liberation movements and newly elected democratic governments.⁵ In spite of oblique references that 'the time for the healing of the wounds has come',⁶ the focus of liberation leaders is mostly on political, legal and economic

3 J Herman *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence from domestic abuse to political terror* (1997) 89.

4 See J Atkinson *Trauma trails: Recreating song lines – the transgenerational effects of trauma in indigenous Australia* (2011); R Clarke, J Dutton & A Johnston 'Shadow zones: Dark travel and postcolonial cultures' (2014) 17 *Postcolonial Studies* 221; Herman (n 2); Lederach & Lederach (n 2); P van der Watt 'Community development in wounded communities: Seductive schemes or un-veiling and healing?' (2017) 53 *Community Development Journal* 714.

5 See S Biko *I write what I like. A selection of his writings edited by Aelred Stubbs* (1987); M Cabrera 'Living and surviving in a multiply wounded country. Transcribed talk with envoi' 2003, http://www.medico-international.de/en/projects/social/ps_cabrera_en.pdf (accessed 22 April 2024); F Fanon *The wretched of the earth* (1961 [1990]); P Freire *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970); CJ Kaunda 'The wilderness wandering: A theo-liminal pedagogy for mind decolonisation in African Christianity' (2016) 36 *Acta Theologica* 52; W Maathai *The challenge for Africa – A new vision* (2009).

6 N Mandela 'Nelson Mandela inauguration speech, 10 May 1994', <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/read-nelson-mandelas-inauguration-speech-president-sa> (accessed 22 April 2024).

reform. The psychological and social legacy of protracted oppression is seldom prioritised.

The stories of participants in this research paint in bold colours the depth and extent of the cuts and wounds caused by a long history of displacement, oppression and deprivation in South Africa. They illustrate how the losses continue to manifest, especially in their relationships to self, others and the world around them. It happens in spite of, and sometimes as a result of, political liberation and arrangements to address the wounds. Coming home still eludes them, endangering not only their physical safety and security, but their psychological and social well-being.

There is a dearth of research delineating and explicating historical oppression to predict and explain social problems among the oppressed or their capacity to create 'home'.⁷ In the absence of such understanding, the nature of the woundedness remains obscure and strategies to deliberately seek healing are not explored in post-liberation realities. The result is that opportunities are not created to facilitate processes for the endlessly displaced to find healing: an inner home, meaning and the authentic self. The chapter seeks to understand how insecurity and the repeated loss of a home, accompanied by ongoing attacks on their humanity and security, continue to influence the lives of the oppressed and displaced and to perpetuate inequality. These insecurities and displacements have denied black people the right to the city under apartheid rule. Conceived spaces were seldom permanent and when a house was eventually provided in Botshabelo (far away from the main economic activity in Bloemfontein), it was perceived as home and stability despite its locational dysfunctionality. Although reaping the benefits of city life came at a cost (transport cost due to the dysfunctional location), being located in Botshabelo did bring stability. The question is whether these residents have access to the right to the city (see chapter 1).

7 CE Burnette & CR Figley 'Historical oppression, resilience, and transcendence: Can a holistic framework help explain violence experienced by indigenous people?' (2017) 62 *Social Work* 37; J Nutton & E Fast 'Historical trauma, substance use, and indigenous generations of harm from a 'Big Event' (2015) 50 *Substance Use and Misuse* 839.

2 The original cut, questionable remedies and the festering wounds

The image of a cut or a rupture runs through the discourse on colonialism, war and oppression. These cuts result in multiple layers of wounds and losses that go much deeper than being cut off from the physical land; the uprooted leave behind their dead, their way of living, memories and relationships, as well as a sense of an inner home, of belonging and safety. The future becomes a quest not only to find a place to live; it is a journey in search of the self, meaning and purpose.

2.1 The losses and wounds of invasion, violence and oppression

Atkinson⁸ describes how Aboriginal people had to run away from massacres, their land, their un-buried dead and everything that made life and meaning possible. She calls these bewildered journeys *trauma trails*. These trails cross not only countries and continents; they run over generations. So much is lost during such flights and displacements, including:

Home: During invasion and violence, the colonised and oppressed literally have to run out of their home land to escape danger or starvation. This loss has far-reaching implications, because it is not merely an area drawn on a map: Land is living matter, holding both healing and traumatic memory and energy. The emotive quest for land among the dispossessed, therefore, is about so much more than the physical land; it is about ‘restoring a sense of self, dignity and stability’.⁹ It is about finding a home again, physical, spiritual and emotional.¹⁰

Independence: Without access to hunting or agricultural land or other means of survival, the colonised have no choice but to turn to the invader and oppressor to take care of them, for even their most basic needs. This leads to dependency and a destructive symbiosis, because, as Freire puts it, ‘oppression is domesticating’.¹¹ By limiting education, economic and

8 J Atkinson *Trauma trails: Recreating song lines – The transgenerational effects of trauma in indigenous Australia* (2011).

9 A Masango ‘The land question: The struggle for meaning’ *Daily Maverick* 24 July 2012, <http://dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2012-07-23-the-land-question-the-struggle-for-meaning> (accessed 22 April 2024).

10 Lederach & Lederach (n 2).

11 P Freire *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970) 33.

social freedom and repeatedly forcibly removing the oppressed, there is no opportunity to accumulate any type of generational capital. This prolongs the return to independence.

Systems and leadership: Indigenous governance systems were deliberately ignored and destroyed during colonisation. A favourite strategy of colonial administrators was to impose collaborators as leaders onto the population. These were often outcasts in trouble with the local establishment.¹² Another tool was to 'acknowledge' lower-level chiefs, thus disrupting old systems and setting groups up against each other. These new 'leaders' were *de facto* agents and information gatherers for the colonial government, and were given huge powers and resources to govern with great cruelty.¹³ This laid the foundation for oppressive governance systems, allowing these 'newly powerful men [to become] the new African elite'.¹⁴ For her, this is one of the root causes for the current dearth of good leadership in Africa.

Constructive channelling of emotions: When the shelter of social and cultural structures is damaged, there is no safe place to which to retreat with frightening emotions and experiences. Anger is a normal human response to the violation of self, but in the absence of a safe way to express it or if there is no prospect of affecting change, it turns to violence. Since it is impossible to direct the emotion against the omnipotent oppressor, it finds expression in what Freire calls 'horizontal violence': the 'striking out at their own' and at those with equal or less power.¹⁵ Horizontal violence is in essence misdirected pain and anger, which leads to destructive behaviour, often also against the self, for instance, through substance abuse, suicide and domestic violence. There is nowhere to go with anger and a loss of direction on what to do. Erikson describes it as a loss of 'both their inner compass and their outer maps for what is considered 'proper' behaviour'.¹⁶

Certainty and agency: During periods of genocide, colonial invasion and massacres, whole peoples cried to their gods and ancestors – and were not saved. Hope and dreams are soon replaced by doubt and a

12 Achebe poignantly describes this strategy in his novel *Things fall apart* (1958).

13 Maathai (n 5); N Mostert *Frontiers: The epic of South Africa's creation and the tragedy of the Xhosa people* (1992).

14 Maathai (n 5) 26.

15 Freire (n 11) 44.

16 In Atkinson (n 8) 54.

fatalistic belief in life as predetermined by cosmic or spiritual forces, from which there is no escape. Fatalism is not inherited or responsible for keeping poverty intact; it is repeatedly internalised through the daily experience of futile efforts. If it gets me nowhere to work hard, why bother to dream or set goals in the first place? The oppressed are left without a sense of agency or a belief that they can affect the future. This may lead to a 'numbing of desire' and 'the fading of images for the future', accompanied by feelings of worthlessness and meaninglessness.¹⁷

Relationships and social webs: A long-term legacy of structural oppression is the deliberate destruction of social and family structures, such as the separation of children from their families, forced removals and migrant work. Another form of destruction is the sexual exploitation and rape of indigenous women by settlers. Embedded in this is the humiliation of men, not only because they felt helpless as they could not protect their women and families, but because they too were humiliated by the oppressor. Among the most traumatic memories listed in a study among Aboriginal adults is the childhood experience of having to witness male relatives being abused by authority figures and their mothers being beaten up by male family members. Atkinson¹⁸ traces the high level of domestic violence and sexual abuse in current indigenous communities back to this phenomenon.

An authentic image of the self: One of the most complicated losses is that of the authentic image of self. Maathai¹⁹ describes how Africans have become obscured from themselves – as if they look at themselves through the mirror of another person: the colonial administrator, the missionary, teacher, collaborator or political leader. What they see is 'their own cracked reflection or distorted images, if they see themselves at all'.²⁰ The real damage of colonialism thus is that for centuries, the outside world has been telling Africans (and other colonised peoples) who they are, until the derogatory opinion of the oppressor is gradually internalised. Deutsch²¹ describes this as the 'identification with the aggressor', while

17 J Watkins & H Shulman *Toward psychologies of liberation* (2010) 51, 216-217.

18 Atkinson (n 8).

19 Maathai (n 5).

20 Maathai (n 5) 34.

21 M Deutsch 'A framework for thinking about oppression and its change' (2006) 19 *Social Justice Research* 24.

Freire talks about 'the boss is inside' and to be 'hosts of the oppressor'.²² A picture of self-depreciation starts to emerge: backward, sinful, barbaric, irrelevant, good-for-nothing, ignorant, incapable of learning, lazy and unproductive. These images are compounded by inappropriate education systems and limited economic opportunities, which undermine the possibility of positive outcomes and affirmation.²³

2.2 Promises of homecoming: Political liberation

Colonialism, enslavement and oppression at some stage elicit a struggle to liberate the oppressed, as expressed through the emergence of independence and civil rights movements since the 1950s. Scholars observe a number of obstacles endangering the completion of such liberation processes. First, the oppressed can be drawn into the liberation process 'as ambiguous beings, partly themselves and partly the oppressors housed within them', which cannot result in authentic freedom.²⁴ A second threat is posed when the leaders and new elite are motivated by the possibility of benefits and power – and not by the desire to break the bondage of oppression. This may lead to the silencing of critics and harsh measures to ensure subordination and dependency. Liberation cannot be achieved if the aim is to become like the oppressor or merely to be bosses over other.²⁵

A third danger is unrealistic expectations among the oppressed, exacerbated by the leaders' promises. There are original gains in new democracies, but they are often not sustainable or they may not be uniform (for instance, education improves but no one else or only some get access to it). Status disequilibrium becomes a new source of tension and discontent and arouses a sense of injustice.²⁶ The situation is aggravated by an aloof or incompetent bureaucracy and by threatened liberation movements-turned-governments when they continue to make false claims about their achievements and resulting benefits for the oppressed. The (still) poor and disadvantaged are thereby forced to

22 Freire (n 11) 18, 30.

23 Freire (n 11); Maathai (n 5).

24 Freire (n 11) 108.

25 See Biko (n 5); Cabrera (n 5); Fanon (n 5); Freire (n 11); Kaunda (n 5); Maathai (n 5); Van der Watt (n 4).

26 Deutsch (n 21).

believe that their condition is due to their inferiority, own failings and lack of competence – exactly as the oppressor have been telling them for a long time. Apart from having to endure more inequality and hardship, an incomplete liberation is indeed a cruel way to compound the old wounds and inflict new ones.

Dlanga²⁷ submits that South Africa's liberation did not lead to people becoming their own liberators. Instead, the party remains the liberator, expecting blind gratitude, while the state keeps the people dependent on it, and thus unable to image themselves beyond the organisation. When the party and leaders 'become our freedom', the newly-freed people hold on to the past with no real agenda for the future.²⁸ Such a liberation thus turns into an empty shell, which cannot heal injuries and trauma.²⁹

2.3 Responses and manifestations: Intergenerational wounding

We can't go back to the old ways. The new system is not working.

We are in limbo.

*Our youth are killing themselves.*³⁰

The response of peoples and groups to the wounding is multi-layered, cumulative and eventually cross-generational. The first phase is the original wounding, with the resulting losses. In the next phase, the first generation responds to events, showing signs of biological, societal and psychological distress, which eventually manifest in self-destructive behaviour and attitudes. In the third phase, the responses and manifestations are transmitted to successive generations. The response continues to snowball cumulatively through ongoing and

27 K Dlanga 'If Zuma will not move, Zuma must be moved' *News24* 12 April 2016, <http://www.news24.com/Columnists/Khaya-Dlanga/if-zuma-will-not-move-zuma-must-be-moved-20160412> (accessed 22 April 2024).

28 M Mpondo 'Sight and understanding: My African political dream' *Daily Maverick* 2 April 2014, http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2014-04-02-sight-and-understanding-my-african-political-dream/#.Uz0kB_mSyk0 (accessed 22 April 2024).

29 A Mbembe 'Rule of property versus rule of the poor?' *Mail & Guardian* 15 June 2012, <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-06-15-rule-of-property-versus-rule-of-the-poor> (accessed 22 April 2024).

30 Kunuk, in A Crawford 'The trauma experienced by generations past having an effect in their descendants: Narrative and historical trauma among Inuit in Nunavut, Canada' (2014) 5 *Transcultural Psychiatry* 340.

adverse policies and practices of the oppressor. Through systemic oppression, subordinated groups, for example, are forced to live in circumstances where the development of their intellectual potential, mental health, intra-group cohesiveness, ambitions and social-economic achievement is deliberately stymied. These outcomes are used to support the mythology and stereotypes promulgated by the oppressor and, in a self-fulfilling prophecy, are used to justify further oppression. While the oppressed gradually internalise the public image of inferiority, the socially privileged internalise a corresponding image of superiority. The interaction between these groups perpetuates the system of oppression, the corresponding images and inequality in general.³¹

Equally destructive are the consequences when the oppressed are forced to be dependent on the oppressor for survival, for instance, when the only source of employment is the oppressor. The oppressor becomes omnipotent in the eyes of the oppressed person or group. When the helplessness and frustration turn into anger and anxiety and there is no way to express these, the oppressed tend to internalise the threat by identifying with the oppressor, which in turn leads to guilt, self-hatred, horizontal violence, submission and obedience to the oppressor, as well as depression and related behaviour and attitudes.³²

The wounds inflicted by the oppressor and the subsequent response by the oppressed (on personal, familial and communal level) result in a complex set of manifestations. Scholars, such as Brave Heart,³³ Brown-Rice,³⁴ Burnette & Figley,³⁵ Crawford³⁶ and Deutsch³⁷ observe that oppressed communities often battle with sadness, depression, anger, anxiety, fear, suspicion and rage. They experience feelings of hopelessness, due to the loss of family and tribal connections and an

31 See K Brown-Rice 'Examining the theory of historical trauma among native Americans' (2013) 3 *The Professional Counsellor* 117; CE Cavalieri 'Situating psychotherapy with tribal peoples in a sovereignty paradigm' (2013) 5 *Journal for Social action in Counselling and Psychology* 25; Crawford (n 30); Deutsch (n 21); Nutton & Fast (n 7); Van der Watt (n 4).

32 Deutsch (n 21); Freire (n 11).

33 MYH Brave Heart 'The return to the sacred path: Healing the historical trauma and historical unresolved grief response among the Lakota through a psychoeducational group intervention' (1998) 68 *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 287.

34 Brown-Rice (n 31).

35 Burnette & Figley (n 7).

36 Crawford (n 30).

37 Deutsch (n 21).

omnipotent oppressor. There are signs of psychic numbing, lowered emotional expression, poor affect tolerance, intrusive thoughts, apathy, dependencies and the development of a victim identity. The attitude towards the self turns mainly negative, accompanied by feelings of humiliation, shame, low self-esteem and distrust. Self-destructive behaviour includes increased alcoholism; drug addictions; excessive self-medication; interrupted schooling or drop-out; suicidal thoughts and acts; interpersonal and domestic violence; sexual assault; child abuse and neglect; breakdown in families; and high rates of heart disease, tuberculosis, sexually-transmitted diseases, diabetes and injuries.

It is critical to note that not all people in oppressed groups experience oppression in all aspects of their lives, neither do all individuals and families respond in the same way, even though trends are quite clear in current generations of oppressed peoples and communities. The above responses to and manifestations of protracted oppression, thus, are not indicative of damage to the personalities of oppressed people³⁸ and, importantly, they are not inherent; they are the result of vertical wounding inflicted repeatedly over generations. Horizontal violence, which aptly captures much of the self-inflicted wounds among the oppressed, is a sad reminder of how the wounding over generations has broken the social web, often referred to as ubuntu, compassion and solidarity among the poor.

3 A perpetual search for home in the Free State

In this part, the research participants, who all live in Botshabelo, tell their stories of life in the Free State province of South Africa, before and during the time of liberation.

3.1 Endless displacement: From farm to farm, from Kromdraai to Botshabelo

The interviewees' stories revealed a long history of displacement and a search for some kind of home and security. Most of the interviewees used to live and work on farms in what was called the Orange Free State in apartheid South Africa. They were not displaced as a group. Instead,

38 As above.

individual families moved from farm to farm in search of work and a place to stay. This has to be understood in the context of apartheid legislation: Black people were not allowed to own land (the farms thus belonged to white farmers) and farm workers were not allowed to move into the towns. The problem was exacerbated during the early 1970s, when the South African government decided to freeze township development in an effort to keep cities as 'white' as possible.³⁹ Farm workers were literally and legally trapped on white farms, with no protection against inhumane conditions or treatment and unfair dismissal. When a farmer decided that a worker had to leave, 'you immediately leave and go look for alternative places to work and stay in': If they were chased away or chose to leave, they could only seek new work and a place to stay on 'the next farm'. If the farmer 'felt like evicting you, then he evicted you. Just like that.' Interviewees never had a place that they could call their own. For generations, these families could not settle anywhere or build any physical, social or educational capital.

According to the interviewees, they moved around these farms so regularly that most had a problem to remember the farms where they grew up. There were simply too many. One interviewee remembered that they 'never stayed more than two years on one farm'. Another did not know where she grew up: 'I would not have an idea of where those farms were.' Others had vivid memories of the names of the farms and the farmers. This was either because it was a specifically bad experience, or because the farmer was kind and they had good memories of that farm. The father of one interviewee became worried that 'my children would have nowhere to go' when he died. He had such a good relationship with the farmer that they could discuss this and he left with the farmer's blessing.

The next episode in their story is inextricably linked to the apartheid policy of Bantustans or homelands. Through this ideological scheme, black people would lose their South African citizenship while becoming citizens of their designated ethnic-based Bantustan. There were two Bantustans in the Free State Province: QwaQwa for the Sotho-speaking and Bophuthatswana for the Tswana-speaking people. Bophuthatswana

39 C Twala & L Barnard 'The incorporation of Botshabelo into the former Qwaqwa homeland: A logical consequence of the apartheid system' (2006) 31 *Journal of Contemporary History* 161.

actually became a republic under a president, Lucas Mangope, with Thaba 'Nchu one of seven enclaves spread over several provinces. QwaQwa did not become independent, but gained relative autonomy under the leadership of Dr TK Mopeli.

As a result of the Bantustan policies, as well as economic and agricultural changes in the 1970s, farm workers' need for employment, houses, land and basic services (such as education) increased. Rumours were spread that there was free land and opportunities in a place called Kromdraai and many Sotho farm workers decided to move there. It then turned out that Kromdraai was a rail worker slum in Thaba 'Nchu, within the borders of Bophuthatswana.⁴⁰ Instead of finding home and land, the Sotho-speaking people found themselves in an utterly hostile environment: This was Tswana land and they were perceived intruders.

Interviewees remembered what a terrible struggle the Sotho people had in Kromdraai. They were 'beaten up by the YB police just for being there' (YB was the number plate sign on Bophuthatswana's official vehicles). They had to enter the area 'using back routes', and they knew: 'On the 15th and 30th [of each month] we would be subjected to a raid by the police. Whenever the children would come and visit, they constantly had to hide or sleep on top of the houses to avoid arrest.' After all, 'our children were not supposed to come and visit us because we were regarded as illegal settlers.' 'We persisted, because we were the ones who did not have a place to stay.' They were not allowed near the taps, to collect soil or dung to make or maintain their mud houses or to run small businesses. The YB police would arrest them for anything and it was worse when they arrested the girls as 'some would come back pregnant'. It was 'the painful life we lived under Ntate Mangope'.

As the abuse and deprivation deteriorated, the Kromdraai community turned to Dr Mopeli from QwaQwa for help. By 1978, there were approximately 38 000 people in Kromdraai. Through negotiations with the South Africa government, 28 000 hectares of land just on the other side of the Bophuthatswana border was secured where they could be relocated. It was the farm Onverwacht or 'Unexpected'. Between May

40 S Kono 'Being inclusive to survive in an ethnic conflict: The meaning of "Basotho" for illegal squatters in Thaba 'Nchu, 1970s' (2013) 3 *Southern African Peace and Security Studies* 27; C Murray *Black Mountain: Land, class and power in the eastern Orange Free State, 1880s to 1980s* (1992).

and December 1978, approximately 64 000 people, including those from Kromdraai, were relocated to the new settlement.⁴¹

According to the interviewees, before they could move, they were 'processed'. This included the handing out of Kiki or Kikiyana cards,⁴² without which they could not get onto the government trucks taking them to Onverwacht. On arrival, each family was allocated a site permit and a tent on the site, rows and rows of green tents 'with zippers', something that clearly intrigued the children. They received food for some months. They gradually started to settle and build homes. Onverwacht's name subsequently changed to Botshabelo or 'Place of Refuge'. Forty years later, some of the interviewees still stay on the site allocated to them on that day: 'We stayed in those green tents, and we slowly picked our lives up and that is how you now see this house.'

After their long, difficult and mostly humiliating journey from the farms to Botshabelo, it is no wonder that most interviewees attached so much meaning to the houses in which they now live and perceive as their own. 'Finally, we had places that we could call our own.' For them, these houses meant a form of protection and 'that my family is safe'. One said she would always treasure her current house because it was the legacy left to her by her grandfather, where she nursed her father in his final days and which she would leave to her children. They could gradually leave behind the bad memories, 'the farms and the whites', and start to build new homes and memories.

This Kromdraai-Bophuthaswana-Botshabelo incident confirms patterns undermining existing governance systems, observed in Africa over centuries of colonial oppression. 'Leaders' (acknowledged by few but the colonial rulers) are elevated and neighbours put up against each other through artificial borders, through which social engineering objectives could be brutally enforced.⁴³ The establishment of Botshabelo was not only a solution for a humanitarian crisis; it fitted well into policies restricting the urbanisation of black people. A black settlement 50 kilometres from Bloemfontein provided a work force for the city while preventing the expansion of the existing black township.⁴⁴ During

41 As above; Twala & Barnard (n 39).

42 These seem to be membership cards of Mopeli's Dikwankwetla Party.

43 Maathai (n 5); Mostert (n 13).

44 Murray (n 40); Twala & Barnard (n 39).

negotiations for a democratic South Africa in the early 1990s, the homelands and the 'independent countries' such as Bophuthatswana were reintegrated into South Africa and they disappeared from the map. Kromdraai was destroyed. Memories of this episode, however, have clearly not disappeared.

3.2 Botshabelo and the new South Africa: An illusion of homecoming?

Families started to settle in their tents, or 'purses' as they apparently called their 'zippered homes'. They started to build houses and nothing threatened this stability. The government built schools and they found jobs in the factories subsidised by the apartheid government. This was indeed a time of reprieve. A few years later (1994), the new South Africa was born and a democratic government started to introduce legislation and strategies to establish a more dignified, humane and equal dispensation. This could mean the end of the long search for home.

Suddenly there was the luxury of staying uninterrupted in one place and of moving around and conducting business freely. An interviewee with an entrepreneurial spirit grabbed the opportunity and built a strong business: 'I am completely in love with business. I suffered for a very long time working in Bainsvlei [near Bloemfontein], being paid peanuts.' However, she used the 'peanuts' to save and buy things such as a fridge, which was critical for her current business. She intended to expand into yet another section of Botshabelo. Unfortunately, this type of story was an exception. For most, finding home still remains a dream. Some reasons emerged from the interviews.

The factories were no longer subsidised and were closed. Some never found another job. Interviewees indeed are no longer fighting discriminating laws, but they still stand in long queues waiting to be attended by officials, who are often aloof, rude, corrupt or inept. While not enjoying access to respect, basic services and employment, there is no homecoming – quite literally not, as most indicated that they still have no title deeds for the houses in which they have lived since they moved to Botshabelo. Some interviewees had personal experiences of corruption. One bought a stand and started building her house – just to learn that the stand had already been sold to somebody else. She had a simple question: 'Why have they sold me a stand when they knew that the site belongs to someone else?' Most interviewees appear to still have

nothing but a house to leave to the next generation – a house they cannot prove belongs to them.

Research indicates that fair treatment and procedures are a more pervasive concern for most people than fair outcomes. Procedural justice affirms to people that politeness, respect and dignity are their due. If treated fairly, it is easier to accept a disappointing outcome.⁴⁵ Interviewees have never enjoyed procedural justice, neither in the old nor in the new South Africa. On the contrary, they constantly experience disrespect and indifference, forcing them to repeatedly spend resources to travel to offices, to reapply for documents and being sent from pillar to post. Old inequalities are perpetuated when interviewees' limited education makes it difficult to understand processes and insist on good services. Opportunities and fair treatment thus remain exclusive to those with generational capital.

Promises of a new and dignified life and environment have been broken. An interviewee provided a succinct symbol of the current state of the liberation. In the old South Africa, they had no taps. Now, 'I have a tap, but often there is no water'.

On a deeper level, the disappointment and constant humiliation in spite of the liberation confirm old messages of being worthless, less human and not deserving of even the most basic requirements to live in dignity. It is particularly painful to experience humiliation, violence, exploitation and dependence from those for whom you have voted, trusted and perceived as your own – and not from an oppressive government. The empty taps become a metaphor that for many homecoming is just an empty illusion.

4 Wounds are festering during endless wandering and searching

The interviewees told stories of unimaginable hardship, endured over many generations, and the relative empty changes resulting from liberation. The wounds and losses, as well as the manifestations thereof, are complex. Since so little is done to heal these wounds, they continue to fester and mark lives and relationships.

⁴⁵ Deutsch (n 21).

4.1 Broken and damaged relationships

The consequences of ongoing displacement, oppression and social disruption are especially destructive regarding family relationships. Families participating in the research were often torn apart, and several interviews have a subtext of violence, manipulation and exploitation within families.

A common phenomenon in the interviews is the separation of children from their parents, as a result of parents' long working hours, the distance from work and poverty. One indicated that she only saw her parents once a month, when they brought food for the month. Others were constantly moved around between relatives. An interviewee remembered six moves: paternal grandparents on farms somewhere; an aunt in Botshabelo; her maternal grandparents in Sterkspruit; and then she went home to her parents, but they started selling alcohol in the house and there was too much noise and disturbances to study. She was moved twice more in an effort to finish school. Staying with relatives was not always happy, as an interviewee put it gently: 'At times aunts are nasty towards children.'

There are also indications of high levels of abuse and domestic violence. It could range from a husband refusing that the wife visited her father or family, humiliation ('chasing me around the area'), to physical violence: 'When I finally left him, he had injured me badly.' Another remembered how her husband 'beat me almost every day, even when I did nothing wrong'. Several interviewees mentioned separation and divorce. Atkinson⁴⁶ links the absolute humiliation of men who were beaten up by the oppressor in front of their families to domestic violence and abuse, three to four generations later. An interviewee experienced this: 'The farmer used to beat up our father and eventually chased us away.'

Questions on home ownership further revealed the fragility of family relationships. When asked if anybody might be able to take the house away from them, the majority admitted that the biggest threat was close relatives. An interviewee expressed her fear that, when she passed on, 'other family members, be it from my father's side or my family might then pitch up here and try to either evict or wrestle my children from this

46 Atkinson (n 4).

site, knowing very well that this site belonged to our father'. This turned out to be a common fear among interviewees.

These experiences closely reflect the concept of horizontal violence, described by Freire⁴⁷ as an almost inevitable result of protracted oppression and deprivation. Pain, frustration and anger are channelled onto the self and those with less power, often women, children or the weakest members of the community. Several references to alcoholism, suicide and divorce also confirm that these families could not escape the manifestations of historical oppression and intergenerational wounding.⁴⁸

4.2 Interrupted lives and opportunities

A few interviewees had good memories of growing up on the farms. They remembered brightly decorated mud houses and lots of space and time to play. The dominating story, however, is that of utter poverty and deprivation. An interviewee summarised some of the hardships: 'Our parents struggled to take care of us. We had to work long hours. We could not go to school.' They lived in poor-quality houses, made of bricks, mud, straw or zinc sheeting, with dilapidated windows and zinc doors. A painful memory for one interviewee was: 'We always wore second-hand clothes from the farmer's house.' The arduous journey from the farms, through Kromdraai to Botshabelo, is difficult to comprehend, as an old woman stated: 'Hey, we struggled to get here [Botshabelo]. You fully understood what it means to struggle.' Another described life as a continuous struggle, 'a fight for every blanket'. A grandmother appeared to have blocked out most of her memories: 'I thought of nothing, except my children and the pots. I always wondered if anything was cooking.'

The interviews are interspersed with stories of uprooting and movement. They were often forced to move due to poor working conditions or fights with the farmer: An interviewee believed that they 'never stayed more than two years on one farm'. This instability had several implications. The endless moving from farm to farm left families without an opportunity to recover and build even the most basic assets over generations. Things break during a move, they could not

⁴⁷ Freire (n 11).

⁴⁸ Atkinson (n 4); Brave Heart (n 33); Brown-Rice (n 31).

transport all belongings and not all farmers allowed the same number of livestock, which the worker then had to get rid of. In addition, there is the psychological impact of constantly living in fear that something could happen that would destroy the fragile sense of security or stability. An interviewee verbalised this as follows: 'No mother would want to live with her kids without a home.' This could happen at any moment.

Interrupted education is another recurring theme throughout the interviews. Children did not attend school regularly. Different reasons emerged: There were not farm schools on or near all the farms where they lived; they moved too often (between farms or relatives); something bad happened in the family; or they were taken out of school to work on the farm. An interviewee explained:

We never went to school as we had to take care of the white children on the farm, be it at their school or in their house. We were forced to do that, or else you would be chased away and you then have to go to the next farm to search for work. Even if you did go to school, it was for short times because you would never spend more than two years working and staying on one farm. It was constant moving.

In addition, 'there was only a school up to grade 7'. There were no high schools on the farms and in order to complete their schooling, children were sent to whoever could give them lodging in the townships. Parents thereby lost control over their children's lives and this further contributed to the loss of family life. Another factor impacting on education was teenage pregnancies, either for the girl who had to leave school or siblings who had to look after the babies. Some managed to overcome this, such as the interviewee who was 15 when her child was born, but she went back to school and 'eventually, my child and I were at school at the same time, as well as the father'. Others were not so lucky. One had to leave school in grade 2 to look after the baby of her 16 year-old sister.

The long-term effects of these interruptions and limitations can be felt over generations. While looking for work on the farms, literacy was no requirement. However, when arriving in Botshabelo, education was suddenly critical. An interviewee with hardly any education put it simply: 'I had to find work – and it was not easy.' Botshabelo became a concentration point for ex-farm worker families, who carried with them the 'enduring disadvantages of very little education, relative illiteracy and

the non-transferability of limited skills.⁴⁹ According to Freire,⁵⁰ they also carry the burden of self-depreciation, resulting from the internalisation of the message instilled by the oppressor over a long period: good for nothing, know nothing, incapable of learning anything, and they are sick, lazy and unproductive. Such an image does not support efforts to find, create or sustain work – a reality that emerged quite clearly from the interviews. The limiting of education, combined with the repeated loss of family assets, probably is one of the most enduring factors contributing to inequality, especially if this continues over generations.

4.3 Controlled, dependent and at the mercy of fate

During apartheid, the lives of black people were controlled into the smallest detail. A particularly hated form of control was the requirement that black people always carried certain documents on their bodies. The most notorious of these was called the *dompas* or dumb or stupid pass. White people were not subjected to any of this, which highlighted the inequality and injustice. It was a strategy to control, humiliate and install fear.

Interviewees told many stories about ‘nasty employers’ who had the power to simply take a worker’s pass away, resulting in a type of blacklisting. The worker then ‘needed a new pass to at least move around’. This, in turn, left them at the mercy of mostly aloof or antagonistic bureaucrats to get documents replaced. An interviewee gave details about the procedure: ‘If you want to look for work, there has to be a stamp in it, saying that you are looking for work – or you would get arrested. If you have a visitor, you need to inform the employer or person whose property it was, declaring the name/s of visitor/s and date of visit.’ If you did not make an arrangement, the visitor/s would ‘have to sleep in the bush’ to prevent arrest. ‘Day and night was the same process.’

Another explained how each step was controlled:

If I left without telling the employers where I was going, or when I would be back, it was a serious problem. And they would chase you away with all your belongings the moment you arrived. Your belongings would be thrown in the road, mainly because it was still under apartheid and white people treated us badly at that time.

49 Murray (n 40) 239.

50 Freire (n 11).

Finding a good employer provided welcome reprieve, but it remained precarious. An interviewee had a very nasty experience with a cruel employer and, subsequently, an official who refused to assist. She was then employed by a kind man, but only a few weeks later there was a burglary at his house and he left Bloemfontein. This left her in the street again. This episode clearly illustrates how utterly dependent black people were on the goodwill of white employers and officials.

In fact, from interviewees' stories it appeared that they 'would get arrested for almost everything: for going home, for walking around' and 'you are not supposed to respond' on anything a white person said or did. One confirmed:

I was arrested multiple times. Because I stayed in a hostel on the plots [small holdings], I would get arrested just for going home to visit. My father stayed on the plots there at Bainsvlei and the arrests continued until we left. We were arrested for trespassing. You could only leave with the expressed permission of the white man. And then the white man gave us permission letters, yet we were still arrested. You could then go to jail.

This accurately reflects Biko's observation: No 'average black man can ever at any moment be absolutely sure that he is not breaking a law'.⁵¹

It was common practice to pay workers partially through rations or housing:

You basically worked for your accommodation and as part of your salary you received a bag of mealie [maize] meal. If you smoked, they would also give you a packet of BB [cheapest brand of tobacco]. Fortunately, I did not smoke. So it was a bag of mealie meal and unpasteurised milk.

White people were thus in a position to even control what black people in their employ eat, drink or smoke. Without money, they remained totally dependent on the employer.

In addition to control by white people, each person was also subjected to family decisions and decrees. An interviewee was taken out of school in grade 2 (about age 7) to take care of a sister's unplanned baby. She never had an opportunity to go to school. Another was working in Bloemfontein and was suddenly instructed to come home because her elder sister 'wanted me to be closer to her. It was my sister's decision that I gave up my job and come and stay in this house.' In the yard of one grandmother her children and family members simply set up shacks. She

51 Biko (n 5) 75.

now wanted to get away from the chaos, as 'it is not fun here' and 'being controlled by children is not okay'. It is striking that these demands seemingly are not interrogated or resisted. Since they had arrived in Botshabelo, some interviewees fought for survival and managed to improve their circumstances. They worked hard to build a house, 'brick by brick', or established a successful business through passion and commitment. However, these were exceptions. Most interviewees appeared to have resigned themselves to a fate they believed they could not escape. One told us how hard life had been, but that she 'accepted the situation and had made peace with it'. Another had been struggling 'for a long time, but I am content now with everything, even though I have nothing'. An interviewee concluded her story: 'Even if we get arrested by the police, we will tell them that life is hard. There is nothing that we can do.' Fatalistic acceptance is sometimes linked to religion. An old lady talked about her difficult life and how those who know her 'often wonder how I survived everything ... I always tell them that God has been good to me.'

Fatalism is a common phenomenon in oppressed groups, where there seldom is any reward for own efforts. This is repeatedly internalised through daily experiences, which strips the oppressed of hope and dreams for the future.⁵² Perhaps the strongest expression of fatalism came from an interviewee who worked as domestic worker too far away to see her children grow up: 'To me that was the life I was destined to live.'

4.4 The loss of and search for the authentic self and an inner home

A major objective of oppression is to systematically strip the oppressed of their humanity and convince them of their inferiority. This is particularly hurtful if the humiliation happens on a personal level, for example, between employers and employees. A number of interviewees were domestic workers in white people's homes. This is an especially intimate relationship as workers share every aspect of the white family's life. Yet, they had to understand their 'place' well. One interviewee had a good employer, but

it was during apartheid. You knew that you must never sit on a chair in their house. We knew what to avoid. ... Shaking a white person's hand, that was a total

52 Watkins & Shulman (n 17).

no-no. They would swear at you. As a black person you had your own chair, your own mug, your own plate that you used, and your own room that you lived in. If you had to take off your uniform, you had to pack it in your own room. They wanted nothing of you near them. I do not know why the whites hated us so much. Maybe we had a bad smell. But what were we to do, we wanted life.

Another interviewee noted:

During apartheid, whites felt nothing for us. Every time they spoke to you, they would remind you that the gate is open. You were not supposed to make any mistake. You were not supposed to arrive late at work. If you are late for work, they will say whatever they want to say to you, and you are not supposed to respond. We worked like that until we went on pension. We worked six to six every day, no leave, nothing. We worked during difficult times.

Interviewees got the message that something was so wrong with them that they should stay away from white people, that they needed different documents and could not share the same plates and chairs. Messages of inferiority and superiority are internalised and can only be exposed and countered when they are brought to consciousness.⁵³ If this does not happen, the oppressed continue to live in the duality in which '*to be is to be like* and *to be like is to be like the oppressor*'.⁵⁴ An especially sad confirmation of this phenomenon came from an interviewee, explaining that life in Botshabelo is much better than their existence before: 'We are white here.'

5 Deliberate wounding requires deliberate healing

Communal wounding is systematically and deliberately inflicted; the healing of these wounds will require the same level of deliberateness.⁵⁵ Burnette & Figley⁵⁶ emphasise that the social, cultural, mental and psychological well-being of the oppressed is undermined by protracted oppression which, in turn, compounds inequality and makes it very difficult to imagine a different future. It is clear from both the literature and the interviews that derogatory messages and public attitudes may eventually be internalised. This can lead to denial, fatalism and self-loathing, obscuring the authentic self.

53 Deutsch (n 21); Maathai (n 5); Van der Watt (n 4).

54 Freire (n 11) 30.

55 Van der Watt (n 4).

56 Burnette & Figley (n 7).

Biko⁵⁷ thus warns against an exclusive focus on the physical chains of oppression; we need to battle for the liberation of the authentic and free self. Unfortunately, it appears that liberation leaderships generally fail to fully appreciate, expose and address the multiple layers of intergenerational wounding. Instead, they focus mostly on political, economic and legal reform and infrastructural and institutional redress. Hardly any resources are allocated to deal with the long-term psychological and social responses and manifestations resulting from oppression and injustice. If this is not happening, fatalism will persist, as well as an acceptance that there is no hope to move out of a position of inequality, insecurity and inhumanity. If politics prove not to change much in their lives, there is no alternative but to believe that this is how they are doomed to live.

Cavalieri,⁵⁸ Burnette and Figley⁵⁹ and Nutton & Fast⁶⁰ call for urgent research to better understand the linkage between historical wounds and social problems commonly observed in oppressed communities. The social problems associated with distressed communities will continue to persist as long as the authentic image of the self is not given an opportunity to emerge. Without an understanding of this, appropriate remedies will not be sought and funded.

The manifestations of intergenerational wounding are observed in the interviews. It is also clear that the healing thereof is not yet prioritised, because no indication was found of deliberate efforts to address these.

6 Conclusion: The journey in search of home is not over yet

Violent invasion, oppression and war involve a journey. For the oppressor, explorers, settlers and mercantilists, it is about adventure, conquest and acquisition. The colonised, vanquished and displaced undertake their journey as survivors, slaves, refugees or indentured workers, as they run, flee or are transported away from everything familiar and meaningful. The future quest of the uprooted thus is not only to find a place to live; it becomes a search for an inner home, meaning and purpose.

57 Biko (n 5).

58 Cavalieri (n 31).

59 Burnette and Figley (n 7).

60 Nutton & Fast (n 7).

Throughout this research we have heard an account of displacement and journeying, of a search for home, humanity and some respite. Even though they were not running away from armed invasions, the interviewees were running away from the massacres of their daily lives, leaving 'trauma trails' all over the Free State. There was no opportunity to become settled, process what happened, mourn losses and catastrophes or form relationships. Theirs was a never-ending journey from farm to farm, between family members and schools, from officer to officer – a desperate effort to avoid becoming destitute or be arrested. Families and individuals were forced to experience brutal indignities, aimed at making them understand their inferior position or other-ness: They had to sleep on roofs and in the field to avoid arrest or beatings; they were not allowed to fetch water or even mud or dung for their houses; they were not allowed on white peoples' chairs, drink from their mugs or greet them with their hands; and they had to eat, drink and smoke what the boss decided they should eat, drink and smoke. They were constantly at the mercy of a person or state organ, with no opportunity to regain control. The options open for expressing anger and frustration were limited, often resulting and manifesting in horizontal violence, self-destructive behaviour, fatalism or resignation – all of which continue to inflict new wounds and compound the sense of not being fully human and deserving of dignity.

Coming to Botshabelo, the 'place of refuge', has in a way been a final arrival. They had not been chased away or forcibly removed for decades, which made it possible to stay in one house they perceive as their own. On many levels, however, they are still not at home. Political liberation has not brought the expected freedom, change and dignity. They struggle to receive official acknowledgment of ownership of their houses. They cannot find employment and are dependent on government grants and family members, merely to survive. Building meaningful lives and relationships hardly feature in their stories. Many remain trapped by the festering wounds of intergenerational oppression, which manifest in high levels of horizontal violence, insufficient education, destructive behaviour, dysfunctional family relationships, dependence and fatalism. For many, the search for home, safety and the self has not ended when they did find a physical house or managed to cast their vote in a democratic dispensation.

The social distress and impact of enduring inequality cannot be appreciated, predicted and addressed without a clear understanding of the interwoven responses and manifestations of protracted oppression and the psychological impact of an incomplete liberation. This is complicated by the difficulty to determine the causality: The wounding has not stopped since the original cut and the responses to these continue to result in a growing list of manifestations, which in turn are used to justify further oppression or manipulation – which in turn elicits new responses, manifestations and wounds ... The journey in search of a physical and an inner home is not over yet. Instead, inequality endures. Although there is some form of stability and access to the right to the city, the dysfunctional location means that the full value of city life (and the right to the city) remains elusive.

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