

Cyril Adonis  
Human Science Research Council (HSRC)

**Historical injustices, and intergenerational  
justice and equity: Perspectives of  
descendants of victims of apartheid era  
gross human rights violations**

“Restitution Conference” 10-11 November 2016, Castle of Good Hope,  
Cape Town

# Background

- ❑ History of race-based oppression, exploitation, and discrimination;
- ❑ Securing rights, benefits, and privileges for Whites at the expense of Black people;
- ❑ A codification of racism not seen in the world before (Gibson, 2004);
- ❑ Political and economic power structures that entrenched White privilege vis-à-vis Blacks;
- ❑ Depriving Black people of land ownership;
- ❑ subservient and exploitative labor to serve the interests of racist capitalism.

# Background cont...

- ❑ Post 1994 – Truth and Reconciliation Commission;
- ❑ Focus on gross human rights violation (1960-1994);
- ❑ Victims of Apartheid were not only the approximately 21 300 who filed gross human rights petitions with the Commission, but the millions of Blacks for whom collective expulsions, forced migration, bulldozing, gutting or seizure of homes, the mandatory carrying of passes, forced removals into rural ghettos, unemployment, and increased poverty and desperation, were grim daily realities (TRC Final Report, Vol. 1, 1998).

# Contemporary South Africa

- Little improvement in material realities of majority of Black people;
- Little attempt on the part of the white populace to acknowledge the evils of colonialism, segregation, and Apartheid-inspired discrimination, oppression, and exploitation (Terreblanche, 2002);
- Implications for social cohesion;

# Conceptual Framework

## HISTORICAL TRAUMA THEORY (Sotero, 2006)

### Four assumptions

- ❑ Mass trauma is deliberately and systematically inflicted upon a target population by a subjugating, dominant population;
- ❑ Trauma is not limited to a single catastrophic event, but continues over an extended period of time;
- ❑ Traumatic events reverberate throughout the population, creating a universal experience of trauma;
- ❑ The magnitude of the trauma experience derails the population from its natural, projected historical course resulting in a legacy of physical, social, and economic disparities that persists across generations (Sotero, 2006).

## THE LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE (Bengtson & Allen, 1993)

- ❑ the interaction of the person and the environment (Maddox & Campbell, 1985);
- ❑ Gives attention to the unfolding history of intimate connections in families and the social context of these in terms of social structure and historical location (Bengtson & Allen, 1993);
- ❑ Enables scholars and policy makers to examine historical circumstances that have affected the lives of members of different generations (Hareven, 1996);
- ❑ Explains the differences in experiences shaping people's respective life histories;
- ❑ Illuminate the ways in which problems, needs, and patterns of adaptation were shaped by earlier life experiences and by the historical conditions affecting them (Hareven, 1996).

# Methodology

- ❑ Exploratory; Interpretative;
- ❑ Children and grandchildren of Black South Africans who testified at the TRC as victims of 'gross human rights violations'.
- ❑ GRHV – (a) killings, abductions, torture, severe ill treatment of any person; or (b) any attempt, conspiracy, incitement, instigation, command, or procurement to commit an act referred to in (a) (Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, 1995).
- ❑ Accessed through Khulumani Support Group ('speak out')

# Secondary trauma

- *I grew up thinking that there are people who are against my father. Then seeing him laying there at the hospital after the bomb explosion, it triggered again back to me that now this time they almost killed him. While I was growing up all these things came back to me. It has affected me, traumatized me.*
- *They told me maybe a week earlier and...my teacher brought the subject up. So I started crying in class, and people were shocked. They didn't know what was going on, and I couldn't explain. Then I explained to my history teacher. Only then did they understand. I never thought it would affect me that badly. I was traumatized. It's better now because I'm older, but because my grandfather's case was prominent, you hear about it sometimes on the media and you can't help but to be affected all over again because you are reminded of what they did to him.*
- *I was exposed to the sadness because we all stay together and we were close. I couldn't escape it. I was traumatized because they were traumatized. I remember being sad because my mother and grandmother was sad.*
- *It affect my grandmother...It also affected my mother a lot. My grandmother talks, but its traumatic, and when she talks, she cries. My mother too also cries. It affected me in a bad way. You could say I am also traumatized.*



# Continuing socio-economic marginalisation

- *I am asking myself each and every day that if I'm really free, why am I suffering. So, not much has changed, not at all. Only when you are free from suffering can you say that you are really free. I am struggling because of the consequences of apartheid.*
- *I haven't got a job, nothing. We are still struggling. Things are still the same. Nothing has changed. We can vote, but we still live in shacks, we can't afford food, education, all the things that was fought for and for which people died. Things are getting worse and worse.*
- *We are still struggling and things are difficult because you cannot get a job, because you have no learning and you can't learn if there is no job to pay for it. So what is going to happen to us?*
- *You know, there is a lot of crime here in South Africa. This is because things haven't changed for many people. They are still poor and although it is not an excuse, it is the reason why they commit crimes. They have families to feed so they become desperate. They are tired of suffering of waiting for things to get better when it gets worse. I would not do that, but I can understand.*

# Continuing racism

- *I see White people they still do the same things they did that time. They treat us like nothing. Some White people are alright, but others, they not good to Black people. You can see how they treat us, as if we are not human.*
- *I feel bad because we are not treated as equal to Whites. Apartheid has ended, but attitudes and beliefs did not change. They teach their children those same things. I feel unwelcome in restaurants and shops. I don't know if it is ever going to change, if people are ever going to change.*
- *I think, apartheid is gone, but others, White people, they still have apartheid. Because when I read the newspaper, you can see that other places still have apartheid.*
- *I used to see these things all happening and I tell myself, 'I guess things haven't changed as much as people claim they have'. You see racism still going around in school. I expected it, but you always hope that it won't happen.*

# Assignment of blame/culpability

- *If it wasn't for Apartheid, Apartheid was here in this country and as my father was a victim. I end up being a victim. Because I am his offspring I ended up being affected. And not only me, a lot of people's offspring that are being affected. So that is what Apartheid did to people. (Nelson – Son – 27)*
- *Some of the people they might be completely, not completely, but they might be somehow innocent because they were working under instructions. Somehow I would feel sorry for them because of some they would say that it was instructions. So it was not something that it was done on a personal level, it was something as you said it was in South Africa going through a wave. (Theo – Grandson – 27)*
- *They are the people who brought oppression in us. They are the people who brought Apartheid you see. They are the people why things are the way it is still today after Apartheid has ended. The politicians did it for them. They voted for the politicians continuously because they were benefiting from our suffering. (Simon – Son – 27)*

# Lack of accountability or justice

- *These people should be held accountable, but that has not happened. They must be punished for what they did. That is what is supposed to happen. But there is no justice for victims. They get nothing, no justice, no compensation, but they are asked to forgive and reconcile.*
- *They killed people. Why are they not punished? They must be punished, that is all.*
- *You want to fight like all the people of that government, you know. They should be the ones who should be locked in jail. If you did have anything to do with it, to be locked in jail; it is our views and it should have been happening like that. If you were working for the government, then you should be punished...They should not only focus on individual perpetrators. They should also focus on generals and politicians.*
- *My father was violated, but nothing happened. He wasn't helped by anyone, even after apartheid. There was no justice, there needs to be justice, not revenge just justice so that my family's situation can improve, so that they can take care of their needs, medical needs, education for children.*

# Expectations from and responsibilities of government

- *Government should also listen on a day-to-day basis people's sufferings you know, like what the people want. They should on daily basis ask people, 'what do you want'. This will help them understand what is needed, and where it is needed. There is money, but it is either wasted or not spent at all. You always hear of government under spending, yet people are starving.*
- *The government should've at least confiscated the things that they did inherit from those apartheid deeds and then bring the money to us. Money that they got, I think it should be taken from them and it should be given to us because of we are the ones who were suffering because of their deeds.*
- *They've benefited from the past. They made it work for them. It was apartheid. You could do nothing. But now things have changed and we must make use of the opportunities. We cannot always expect government to do things for us although it is their responsibility, they will not always be able to do it. So we need to empower ourselves.*

THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS?