

Systemic Racism: A Transgenerational Trauma Haunting the Soul of South Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Systemic racism is based in structures and processes that reinforce the power and superiority of white people over people of color. This essay deconstructs the impact of historic trauma and examines how successive generations become trapped in the vortex of the past. Though South Africa is now considered to be in its post-apartheid era, its laws of discrimination have had lasting effects on the nation. Throughout this piece, I explore how trauma leads to transgenerational harm. My academic inquiry asks: What is systemic trauma and how did apartheid impact a nation transgenerationally? Does compassionate listening reveal lessons that challenge us to consider systemic racism? In a recent IIRP Presidential Paper called Processing Trauma using the Relational Care Ladder (Rundell, 2021) a developmental approach suggests and encourages structure and nurturing before communication is possible. The power of intentional, compassionate witnessing and listening circles within a post-apartheid era provides a protocol in initiating a structure that is safe and nurturing that supports self-awareness, engagement, and expression of feelings. I wish to share vignettes from a compassionate witnessing session and a listening circle. The lessons are examples for people from South Africa and other nations about ways in which institutional harm, when unchecked, can leave a legacy of trauma.

The history of countries throwing off tyrannical regimes tends to follow a pattern. In the immediate aftermath there is euphoria, accompanied by utopian pledges for the future. Then the new rulers find the business of governing more difficult and messier than they could ever have imagined. They also find that it is far harder to overcome their own past than they had appreciated as they plotted their takeover in prison or in exile. It is this second stage that the true meaning and trajectory of a revolution unfold. —Alec Russell (2010, p. xv)

Race is a social construct that profoundly shapes every aspect of our lives (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 5). It embraces three poisons that destroy human dignity: greed, hate, and delusion (Hanson & Mendius, 2009, p. 42). Colonialism generated both a level of greed for natural resources and the delusion that white people are more civilized than people of other skin colors. Racial superiority begins with these three poisons.

Hawkins (2004) suggests a range of negative emotional energies like pride, anger, greed, revenge, humiliation, and shame may exist and manipulate our day to day lives. He further proposes that if these energies persist, they will self-destruct within families, communities, and countries. Hawkins admonishes humanity to



invite positive energies like willingness, neutrality, and courage into our lives in order to change the tide from self-destruction to connection. Holding on to negative energies eventually will cause destruction; whereas, positive energies bring about synergetic and creative change that moves beyond dualities and divisions between human beings (Hawkins, 2004).

The Western ideologies of individualism and objectivity contrast starkly with the African ideology of “ubuntu” (Kingsley & Nkana, 2018). Ubuntu means “We, not me.” “The central notion of Ubuntu hinges on the idea of collectivity of people rather than the individuality of persons within a given community” (p. 1). Kingsley and Nkana speak to how “ubuntu identity is the foundation of African humane and compassionate living” (p. 9). Ubuntu is a socio-political philosophy that sustained South Africans during the oppressive years of apartheid.

Ubuntu introduces the idea that we are our brother's keeper. This collective identity connects with the Relational Care Ladder (see Figure 1 in Appendix D) as it demonstrates that belonging and being loved is core to the human experience (Rundell, 2021). The four rungs of the ladder refer to what society needs to provide for children while they are developing as human beings. The rungs are structure, nurture, engagement, and challenge. Each rung fulfills an appropriate need within human beings as they develop into adulthood. This cannot be done alone. “We, not me” is the mantra.

All needs require a feeling of safety. Once safety is experienced, awareness arises, which allows a person to express thoughts freely. Learning to share feelings empowers self and others. The most essential of the rungs of the Relational Care Ladder are structure and nurture. It begins at conception and continues throughout life. If these two rungs are absent in the first two years of life, the rhythm and regulation of cortisol is disrupted.

Cortisol, a hormone in the body, gets detoured to the brain's alarm system (the amygdala). Consistent detouring of cortisol brings about changes in the organisms. These changes make the human organism vulnerable to chronic illness later in life (Perry & Winfrey, 2021). Not only does it shorten life expectancy (see the ACE report Felitti et al., 1998) but it repeats the modification in the next generation. These changes in the gene expression explain how transgenerational harm reappears without the person knowing it in the next generation (Cohen, 2001; Siegel, 2013; Doidge, 2015; Levine, 2015; Van der Kolk, 2014).

Creating a society that treats humans with care is critical. The awareness of being loved and having self-worth are human needs that establish connectedness. True citizenship requires a strong sense of belonging, having a voice, and a sense of purpose (Baillie, 2019). Ubuntu and the Relational Care Ladder provide frameworks that help guide modern society toward healing practices.

As an academic who lived through the apartheid era and experienced the delusional ideals of white superiority, I experienced an uncomfortable awareness that many voices were disempowered and never heard. We must understand the repercussions of dismissing human needs for belonging, having a voice and purpose by understanding the following questions:

- How does trauma lead to transgenerational harm?
- How has apartheid impacted individuals transgenerationally?
- How does systemic racism impact the future of a nation?
- How does communication bring hope to individuals and communities in a post-apartheid era?

This paper addresses each of these questions and proposes the process of compassionate witnessing and listening circles as a possible bridge that may address the gap of disempowerment and the unheard voices of a nation experiencing systemic trauma. Listening circles provide a structure and a way to nurture different voices being heard, without judgment or criticism. This uses the first two rungs of the Relational Care Ladder (Rundell, 2021) that create safety and awareness. The questions asked in a go-a-round begin with *how racism impacts them personally and then move to what has been most difficult in talking about racism* (See Figure 3 in Appendix D). Whereas compassionate witnessing allows the first three rungs of the Relational Care Ladder to be explored: structure, nurture and engagement (see Figure 2 in Appendix D). A person is asked to share an experience of racism, its impact, and its difficulties, then witnesses may respond to how the information resonated with them. Witnesses express care, compassion, curiosity, and connection to the person's story but never judgment.

The person sharing the story is then able to respond to witnesses' comments and explore other aspects that may come up. Both compassionate witnessing and listening circle processes will be shared later in this essay.

HOW DOES TRAUMA LEAD TO TRANSGENERATIONAL HARM?

What is regarded as trauma? Over the years, the definition of trauma has evolved from the "shellshock" of soldiers returning from the first and second world wars to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—when symptoms of nightmares, mood swings, and depression became apparent in soldiers returning home from Vietnam - to recognizing the more enduring and persistent subtleties of neglect, abuse, and disempowerment as possible sources of harm.

Today, the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study (Felitti et al., 1998), provided well-documented research that identified how high-stress levels and trauma can change a child's brain chemistry, brain architecture, and even gene expression. When children experience abuse, neglect, and witness violence within a home or community, it leads to toxic levels of stress. Depending on the duration and excessive exposure and activation of stress, this may develop into chronic illnesses physiologically and behavioral changes in later life. The impact of these adverse childhood experiences may lead to early adult deaths. This study has generated the need for organizations to address trauma-informed care (TIC) and trauma-informed response (TIR) (Merrick MT, Ford DC, Ports KA, et al. 2019).

The Diagnostic Statistical Manual-5's (DSM-5) latest diagnosis of trauma and stress-related disorders brings together a range of conditions, including anxiety, acute stress, post-traumatic stress, reactive attachment, and disinhibited social engagement and adjustment disorders. When stress-related disorders deregulate and imbalance a child at a young age, the child may learn to block the stress by using a behavior or thought to distract themselves. This pattern of distraction becomes part of their resilience in childhood. As an adult, this resilience may occur as a firm patterned structure that may be referred to as a compulsive disorder. Many compulsive thoughts or behaviors are indicators of dissociation. Worth noting is that the DSM-5 places compulsive disorders as symptoms that may be precursors to dissociative disorders due to the possibility of etiological relationships (DSM-5, 169).

Our understanding of trauma itself has been expanded. It is now widely acknowledged that traumatic stress can be experienced beyond those directly impacted. The DSM-5 states that "traumatic events are more explicitly

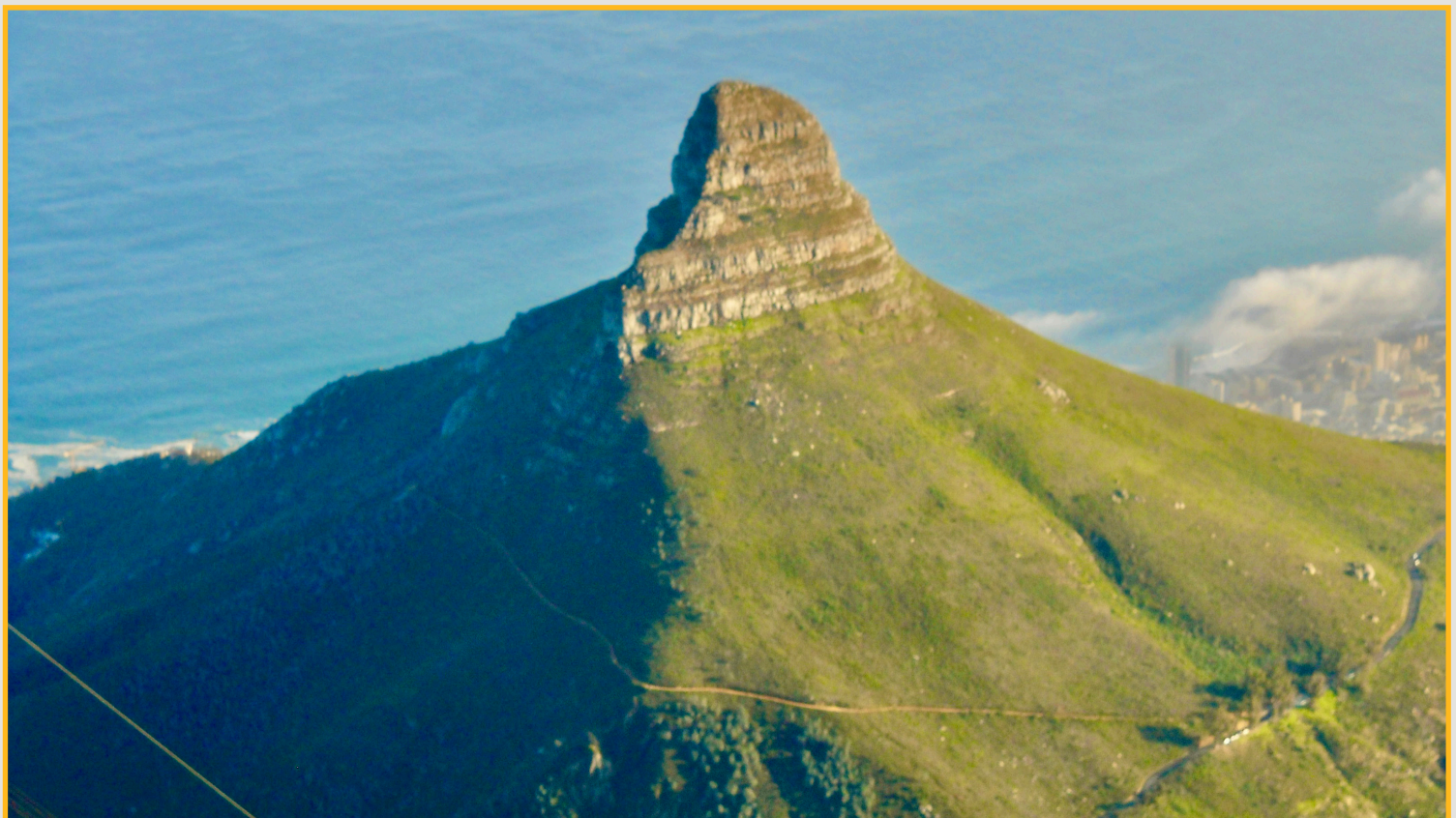
specified as having been experienced directly, witnessed, or experienced indirectly” (170). The complex nuances and implications of an individual or collective experience of shock or harm depends on frequency, intensity, and duration (Perry & Winfrey, 2021. p. 236). Perry speaks to how beliefs and values stored in the highest and most complex cortex may be subject to a lower part of the brain that makes for sensory associations. These associations may be distorted, inaccurate, and possibly racist associations (236). The lower parts of the brain drive the bias. In the case of South Africa, its government-imposed discriminatory laws on its people from 1948 to 1994 saw that frequency, intensity, and duration were all present. Even though formal apartheid has been abolished, as Diangelo suggests, “systems of oppression are deeply rooted and not overcome with the simple passage of legislation . . . systems of oppression are. . . less flexible than popular ideology would acknowledge” (2018, pp. 40–48).

The experience of severe shock or harm may linger in the body and mind beyond the actual incident. Today, due to neuroscience, we understand that the body has a unique way of retaining shock and harm to protect the individual (Seigel, 2013; Levine, 2015; Weingarten, 2003). Once trauma is locked in the body, the body’s instinctive reactions perceive threat quickly. The result is that we retain triggers in our bodies. These triggers set up emotional responses—specifically fear, anger, terror, and rage at an exponential level. These are quickly accessed when a trigger is felt in the body. The

emotional pattern may be an over-emotional response (called hyperarousal), or a numb, catatonic response (called hypo-arousal). If a repetitive pattern is self-destructive, it will destabilize relationships with self and others (Levine, 2015, p. xxi, xxii).

Derezotes (2014) purports that “interpersonal violence creates sociohistorical trauma, which is any ongoing reaction to the initial violence . . . On the collective (or macro) level, sociohistorical trauma is characterized by the substitution of power, aggression, and control over others (1). He further explains how the experience of loss of self-respect and dignity leads to ongoing cycles of revenge between larger groups, for example, war, slavery, and nationwide oppression. When individuals who have been traumatized are silenced and unable to engage in constructive dialogue, many times the only resort is “out of relationship” self-destruction (2). Just as personal trauma may be felt by others, in addition to the one directly traumatized, “socio-historical trauma is violence perpetuated by people on other people and may be primary (experienced firsthand) and/or secondary (experienced through my friends, family, ancestors)” (2).

Levine (2015) explains how the brain protects from harmful experiences by changing the memory process to make it less conscious. Implicit memory from harm may be revealed through emotional triggers and procedural bodily memories (e.g., obsessive-compulsive thoughts or behaviors that occur at a subconscious level). When trauma changes thoughts and/or behaviors, it also





changes the physiology of the brain and genes. These changes may then reappear within the next generation without the individual knowing. An individual caught up in an emotional and /or procedural memory is reacting what is called an implicit memory carried from a prior generational harm (Levine, 2015., Perry & Winfrey). Weingarten (2003) emphasizes how an individual may neither experience, witness, nor directly know about the harm, yet carry the implicit memory emotionally or procedurally through a behavior or thought pattern. This creates transgenerational harm of a different nature. With historic trauma, large groups of people have been harmed with little therapeutic assistance to relieve the bodily reactions and emotions from trapped trauma that resides within the body. The complex impacts felt generations later are invisible to authorities. Yet, we see symptoms like obsessive compulsive behaviors and thoughts inhabiting many people without recognizing the trauma that exists at a deeper level (van der Kolk, 2014). The impact of trauma has been shown to not be just an event. It is a de-regulation of the neural pathways in the brain that impact the individual over time.

Levine explains that generational trauma is implicitly transferred through past and future generations (Levine, 2015, p. 165). Levine cites a pivotal experiment (Dias & Ressler, 2014) that highlights how a neutral smell of cherry blossoms was introduced to mice and followed up by an aversive electric shock. "After several pairings, the mice froze in fear when the smell was presented alone, in the absence of the shock. However, what is astonishing about the experiment was that this same robust conditioned response was retained through at least five generations of progeny" (162).

Other researchers (Santrock, 2008; Dias & Ressler, 2014; Levine, 1997) have demonstrated similar patterns sustained over generations with humans. For example, when trauma or harm causes major changes to the neural pathways of the brain, families are at a major risk of transferring harm. Through studies of survivors from the Holocaust, it has been shown how future generations inherit structural changes and pass them on to their children (Levine, 2015; Siegel, 2013). Obsessional behaviors and thoughts are common coping strategies the body uses to help control the anxiety—e.g., phobias of germs, heights, elevators, and animals

(Siegel, 2013; Doidge, 2015; Levine, 2015). Anxiety and obsessive thoughts or behaviors may then be retained for generations without the individual knowing where the emotion set off the belief or behavior.

HOW HAS APARTHEID IMPACTED INDIVIDUALS TRANSGENERATIONALLY?

"The terms "identity politics" refers to the focus on the barriers specific groups faced in their struggle for equality" (Diangelo, 2018, p.xiii).

The impact and implications of post-apartheid South Africa require acknowledgment of historic barriers specific groups faced. In South Africa, there was a nationalist ideal between 1948 and 1978 that denied basic human rights to a vast majority of the population. The National Government enforced more segregation laws than ever in the history of South Africa. Four major race groups were named and acknowledged as White, Black, Colored, and Indian. The racial group called "Colored" was regarded as a mixed parentage between Whites, Blacks, and/or Indians. The transition from White rule to democracy in 1994 was the first phase of postliberation. This first phase was marked by five years where Nelson Mandela created the magic of humanitarianism for a starkly divided nation. During Nelson Mandela's presidency (1994–1999), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was initiated. A democratic constitution included citizens of all color and gender. It took time for the nation to embrace the new constitution, of which President Thabo Mbeki was instrumental in bringing about.

However, in 2008, Jacob Zuma was chosen to lead the African National Congress (ANC) government. His leadership was marked by greed and dishonesty (Kingsley & Nkana, 2018). The corruption instituted during his leadership stripped the nation of major resources. He placed wealth into his personal coffers. Divisions of hatred reappeared. This post-apartheid phase left the nation powerless. The impact and implications affected the entire population of South Africa in different ways. Addressing the heart of where South Africa is today, in the light of historic trauma and the post-apartheid phases, has lessons for other countries desiring

democracy. When governments are consumed by greed and dishonesty to maintain superiority, they serve as a warning sign that needs attention (Russell, 2010).

I conducted a series of compassionate witnessing sessions with a variety of South Africans. Compassionate witnessing is when one intentionally listens to another person's story to move from the landscape of events to the landscape of identity and consciousness. This process of questioning is explicit in the narrative questions exploring historic trauma. (See Figure 2 in Appendix D) Speaking to several South Africans about the impact of prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and discrimination during apartheid brought up a wide range of feelings and emotions as well as different perceptions. The symptoms of a nation experiencing apartheid showed in the paranoia around security checks within every store or public place. Locking the car or securing other possessions was paramount. Job opportunities preferencing Whites, as well as salary discrepancies between different races, were noticeable. Segregation in public places was upheld. Above all, there was an awareness that education was conducted in silos and funding was disproportionate to the extreme.

The question of how historic trauma lives on in people's lives requires us to look at the neurobiological impact where fight or flight become natural responses. My compassionate witnessing session with Henry (who calls himself a "Brown person") shows how sensitivity to harm required him to become aware of his triggers as an adult. Henry, a South African Colored, grew up in Port Elizabeth. He became an activist in his youth and then a teacher. Henry later left South Africa for the United States of America but his trauma followed him. This is an example of the enduring impact of apartheid on an individual.

HENRY: A TRANS-GENERATIONAL EXPERIENCE

As a Brown person (known as a Colored in South Africa), when I was seven years old, apartheid made no sense to me. When asking my parents why we could not do what I saw White people doing, I was given some excuse. Protected by my parents who made excuses, in an effort to not have me feel inferior, was common practice. My parents would always say "Not today." One example was going to a Kentucky Fried Chicken window to buy food. Then eating it in our car. "Can we not go inside and eat it in the restaurant like other people are doing?" "Not tonight," was my father's answer. Never telling me the truth.

It was not until high school that it hit me, and I became an activist. Apartheid was dehumanizing. I heard about Mandela in jail fighting for human rights. Things became real in high school. Realizing the injustices and inequality in South Africa, I decided to get involved because I believed

it was grossly wrong. I got into trouble for my activism. But this is where my community protected me. Being involved in the church gave me access to the church office to roll off leaflets to inform people of rallies and such. My community was so small and connected that my dad was informed of my whereabouts before I even got home.

The community protected me in some strange way. The special branch in the police force would be out to get me. They had their eye on me. They tried to get me early one morning. My mom gave them my brother instead. Before the police realized they had the wrong person, I was taken to my auntie's house for safekeeping.

While at college, I experienced police brutality where sham buck beatings and tear gas were used. One policeman once said to me, "You Hotnot! (a derogatory term used for Colored). I am putting you away till Christmas." In 1985, as a first-year student at teachers training college, the country was in a state of emergency, and nobody was allowed to gather in groups. I happened to be standing on the stoop (veranda) when a policeman stopped and threw me into the back of the police van. He was unable to close the police van door due to five aunties climbing in after me and refusing to let me go without them. The policeman eventually had to release me to get them out. I always laugh when I tell that story. This was ubuntu. If the police were going to arrest me, they had to arrest the five women too.

I was active in the struggle for democracy. I fought against injustice since adolescence. When I moved from Port Elizabeth to Bloemfontein in 1997, teachers' colleges in South Africa were closing down and amalgamated into universities. I was headhunted by Orange Free State University for a position. They courted me and said they needed me, only to be told by the White gentleman who did the courting that they were really looking for a "Swart," meaning a Black. I was again in a new democracy not good enough for the position. I realized then that discrimination still exists. In 1999, I left the country. The Brown person was not good enough.

There were no benefits during apartheid. Schools were segregated; you were not allowed in the restaurants. No privileges at all. My father, uncles, and grandfather were all tradesmen and masons who built the best-known buildings in Port Elizabeth. They built churches, hotels, and schools. I was never allowed to enter and enjoy learning in these buildings. My dad would drive me through the suburbs where he had built structures so that I could see his handiwork. Many years later, as a teacher myself, I attended a conference in Port Elizabeth when someone saw my name tag and asked if I was related to the man who built his home. Yes! I was. At this multiracial conference, this gentleman looked at me and raved about "what a beautiful home your dad built . . . So darn good!" he said. These men were never

educated beyond high school. Yet built the best houses. As a child, my dad bought this beautiful, yellow BMW. Parked at the roadhouse, a White family pulled up. A child in that car shouted out to his father, "Look at the nice car!" The father replied, "Oh Lord! They must have sold a lot of illegal drink." My dad had to explain to us how it does not make us less of a person.

In 1991 South Africa, the quota system just before democracy was in place. I was finally exposed to a multiracial group and started making friends with all different racial groups. For the first time I realized that there was no difference between others, only the skin color. They were my friends, and I had the courage to introduce them to my parents and grandparents. Our dinner was lamb curry. My friend's response was: "Mrs. A, this is by far the best curry I have tasted." Telling my mom that her cooking was the best had me smiling.

Even today, years later, I get stuck on injustices and am extremely sensitive to any form of perceived inequality. I have to stop myself or I would overreact. I am so passionate about fighting for refugees' and homeless seekers' rights. There are implicit and explicit biases I feel as a teacher and a fearless leader. Being "Brown" and having an accent is perceived as "not being smart or bright." I catch the way a person speaks to me, and I become aware of the nuance.

One example was that in the USA I co-founded a school with a colleague for a charter school in Cleveland. In putting together a board of directors, my colleague became president of board. A scenario came about where he interacted with me, and my reaction was to laugh. He got mad and saw it as an insult. He asked to go outside of the board meeting. Once outside, he pointed at me and shouted. I felt small and humiliated. This White colleague had the right to speak to me this way. It triggered me to the same shame moments I had in South Africa.

Another occasion I had was when a South African friend in Gulf Port had a gift my dad sent for me. School was closed and I told the board director I was leaving for Gulf Port. He started to yell at me. I told him, "I cannot respond to you. This feels like the trauma I experienced back in apartheid South Africa. I cannot speak to you. It was the law of the land. I am leaving and will be back." I resigned from the school I started because I could not stand being humiliated. The experience my family and I experienced remains still within me. Besides a bodily reaction, I still have the details written in a book with every phone call of how this man treated me. I resigned.

On another occasion in the USA, as an adjunct at a university, a friend asked me to teach a class for him at his college. He said I could obtain the key to the classroom at the front desk. The lady at the front desk, seeing me coming,

said I would find the class for taxi drivers in Room 23. I held my composure, then simply explained the benefits of taxi drivers. "But today I am not here to attend a taxi driver class. I happen to be here to teach an educational course." She apologized but I immediately went to an old message: "You are a Brown person . . . who sells illegal drink to become anything. I cannot be educated."

I find myself constructively speaking to the inequality when I find others ignorant or insensitive to what is said or done. I am going to educate you. I will explain to you how that made me feel. How others may perceive it. "I did not mean it" is the usual response, however this is how it makes me feel.

The sad thing about where I am with my country is that what we fought for in my country is being replicated by the Black government. It is sad that 30% is a pass for our students.

I was so thrilled when we first got our democracy. My cousins would be integrated into the very schools that my father had built.

People in power are still abusing it. It was not just the nationalists playing their part. There is more division in South Africa now than ever before. The country came together with Mandela, but it died when Nelson Mandela left. Mandela was the Moses of South Africa and led us out of the desert. He was respected because he was honest and a real leader for the people. His ability to forgive marked his humanity.

Twenty-five years into post-democracy has seen no change. They need to move beyond affirmative action. There are people who are qualified for the jobs. Stop using political appointments who have no knowledge. Choose people who have the nation in their heart, to take those positions. Corruption must end.

I miss the warmth of my people, where I can stop by at any time to have melkert (Afrikaans for milk tart, a koeksuster (sweet cake), or lamb curry. The substance of friendships in South Africa is different and long-lasting. I have friends there since the age of two years old. I miss that. How do we get where we are?

Today Henry greets all his students with a song and a dance to start each day. He allowed himself to share and open others to his experience. Being vulnerable like this is not easy. But it allows the sharing of an experience to increase the social and emotional connections we have with one another (Brown, 2012). The compassionate witness questions asked of Henry have been provided. (See Figure 2 in Appendix D)

In summary, it may be concluded that working

compassionately with historic or generational trauma opens a window of understanding for the storyteller and the witnesses. Henry's implicit memory during his South African childhood and adolescence are the associations he uses today to interpret his experiences in the USA. Henry had worked through his many triggers and transformed them in an assertive way that allowed him to empower others who came in contact with him. Henry had to learn to recognize his trigger, acknowledge it, check where it impacted his body, and then take five deep breaths to release the tension. Taking five deep breaths may be needed anytime during compassionate witness. Facilitators listening to a compassionate story need to be comfortable to practice with storytellers the art of breathing if and when imagery create emotional arousal. Being able to stop and validate acceptance of the body experience, enables the person to remain in control. Visiting the event while in a state of arousal is not advised at all. Notice how Henry explains he was able to hold his composure. That speaks to someone who recognized his body experience and was able to move to acceptance. The long-term trauma of apartheid revisited him in many new situations in his newfound country, where prejudice and stigma sensitized him in various work situations.

Allowing the storyteller to feel safe and have a voice creates a powerful space to recognize that "we are us" in the spirit of Ubuntu.

Given that compassionate witnessing can defy the isolation a person experiences, if we fail to listen and hear these stories of racism, we become complicit in furthering misinformation.

HOW DOES SYSTEMIC RACISM IMPACT THE FUTURE OF A NATION?

"Bring [up] the past, [but] only if you're going to build from it." –Domenico Estrada

Mandela heralded in a honeymoon phase of democracy from 1996 to 2007, but this relief from apartheid was short-lived. The second phase of institutional harm in South Africa came during 2008–2018 (Russell, 2010). A wide range of South Africans' perceptions has been gathered within this second phase of institutional harm that demonstrates the long-lasting effects of historic trauma. Harm permeates long after a honeymoon phase of democracy. It requires continual mindful checks before perceptions and attitudes change. The role of top-down and bottom-up agencies all play a role in this process (Russell, 2010., Kingsley & Nkana, 2018).

In the *South African Post* (cited in Russell, 2010; April 23, 2008) a reporter wrote, "The terrible irony is that the

very victims of apartheid, oppressed and marginalized because of their skin color and race, have now become oppressors themselves."

With this, the "South African Ubuntu ideology, which is her contribution to a global community" was shattered (Kingsley & Nkana, 2018). Xenophobia continues to surge, targeting overseas companies that exist in South Africa. "Xenophobia manifests in collective fear and results in aggression by a community against migrants"; it is seen as the broadest sense of racism (Kingsley & Nkana, 2018). According to Kingsley et al this is because both are driven by the same factor and psychological feelings of prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and discrimination. In South Africa, xenophobia is addressed with a derogatory name, "Ma kwerekwere," which refers to "dark-skinned people from other countries of Africa, other than South Africa" (Kingsley & Nkana, 2018).

Okoro proposes that the reasons for this prejudice growing in momentum are fourfold: (1) linguistic reasons, in which South Africans define migrants as inferior and their language as babbling; (2) apartheid laws, which instituted the four racial groups that separated humanity and development and bequeathed a negative psychology to its people; (3) globalization that induces hybridity, flux, and moral anomie, where violence occurs due to the universal African family culture becoming irrelevant; and (4) South Africa's poor economy and underdevelopment in addressing the needs of its people, which fuel the idea that migrants take away much-needed work and exploit business opportunities (Kingsley & Nkana, 2018).

The challenge currently in the post-apartheid era is how the national trauma has bred a xenophobic attitude within the nation. Some implicitly and for others explicitly. People have become more divided than before. Bridging this divide among a nation will take years of intentional grassroots work even though the country has one of the most democratic constitutions in the world. The listening circles I conducted in South Africa provided insights into how different races shared their genuine feelings. It confirmed, the awareness within South Africa, that all races and ethnicities have been compromised and challenged. Listening circles elicited experiences and validated Kingsley and Nkana's perceptions (2018).

HOW COMMUNICATION BRINGS HOPE TO INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES IN A POST -APARTHEID ERA

"By changing our present-time sensations and image..... the central question becomes how to utilize naturalistic methods to help people alter their memories and come to peace with them." (Levine 2015, p. 141)



Trust is one value that tends to be compromised when we fail to listen to each other. Introducing listening circles requires compassionate facilitators who understand the process of maintaining structure and nurturing. Moving toward reconciliation in the twenty-first century for South Africans will require courage. Engaging in dialogues that invite awareness without judgment is a challenge. The use of a listening circle is an example of how to open up a safe space to discuss controversial issues.

Circles are not dialogues or discussions where facilitators give advice or even judgments on how others are being impacted. Neither are they meant to solve a problem. This is sometimes difficult for participants to understand. The circle is a structure for safety. Check-ins are used and facilitators are part of the process. Community agreements are established by the group acknowledging the norms for group participation. The norm agreements nurture participation, and listening creates the awareness of the impact of an experience on different people. In this way, listening circles create awareness where multiple voices may be heard on an issue or harm. (See Figure 3 in Appendix D)

Implementing listening circles within the South African context to increase awareness and hear other voices in a safe space was initiated. These findings are at their initial stage. The questions asked within the circle process considered:

- What impact has apartheid had on you personally?
- What has made it difficult to speak to this issue?
- What supports do you wish to keep in mind as you move forward?

In the section that follows, four South African voices from a listening circle reveal how this type of circle invites new realizations and perceptions. Names have been changed to protect the participants in the listening circle. Please note that since 1994, South Africa has had its most democratic constitution, in which eleven languages are recognized as official languages. However, the experiences shared below reveal the gaps in the implementation of a perfect democracy.

FOUR SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCES OF APARTHEID AND POST-APARTHEID

VIGNETTE: DAMIAN

I pursue justice as a Colored, and I am concerned about my community. The Colored community has not had the opportunity to change since apartheid terminated. I speak out continually about this. The stories shared among the Colored people are emotionally still the same. Our culture is not getting recognition. We were the favorite stepchild during apartheid. Now during our so-called democratic years, we are pushed to the side. We are pawns in the game. Politicians speak about the Koi and the San. What are we? Working on creating that “wok-ness” to change the awareness within our Colored population is hard. I take four steps forward and ten steps backwards.

I don't stop talking about the pain. Within my community, not many people can talk about it. It is Pandora's box. I shelve my emotions. Maybe I have a more militant approach. There is a frustration when I tap into my emotions. I feel helpless. Why is low-cost housing still being built in my community,

where there is so much pollution that causes asthma and other illnesses in our children? It is an insult as I journey through my community. I walk through these dark and lonely places, only to be horrified that this is the democracy we fought for. Sometimes you must react as if you are a robot. The platforms to talk about issues are far and few between. This chasm creates deep-seated emotions within me.

VIGNETTE: REBECCA

As a White privileged woman who presides over a children's court, nothing has changed for me. So, when people cannot access services, do not have adequate health care or education, I cringe. In the maintenance court, and children's court, I see people continually being disempowered by their circumstances. As a Christian, I have a vision of hope for the future. But when I hear how quick it is to pick up a gun or drink or drug, I block out the pain. I feel helpless.

Our constitution is one of the best in the world. We need to hold the government to account.

Children who cannot get birth certificates, be acknowledged as alive, or given food impacts their future, and ours. It is very difficult. I am the recipient of privilege. It is difficult to contribute anything of value since my pain is internal sadness. If I leave this country, what have I contributed? Nothing has changed for others who suffer. I was born into privilege. I am still part of the privileged. I am a South African. My father came from Germany, escaping from the Nazi regime. He did not speak English. I do not speak my father's language. My father did not want me to speak German. I did not learn to know the German culture because of his fear. It has been painful.

We cannot allow this greed and hatred to continue. We must hear each other's stories. Belonging! We do belong. We must figure out what belonging looks like. As we share, I realized how we are being used and abused by our politicians. We are an abused nation. Once our law of racism came down, greed and corruption took over. People in power are greedy and don't care enough. It is plain and simple that greed and power mongering have authority over us.

There is an opportunity for change. We must rally ourselves together.

VIGNETTE: SIPHO

I am a Black South African and conditions in South Africa during apartheid were tough. We have beautiful laws, but they are not benefitting my people. The laws bring new changes into the country, but they are not addressing the real issues of housing, poverty, equity, roads, and services to the Black people.

We speak of democracy, but I live among mostly poor Blacks. Over the bridge live the rich White people. My community has limited water services. Still, others don't have electricity continually. Serious structural issues are not being addressed. These conversations should be happening in the communities where the needs are the greatest. People being involved in the issues need to be invited to share their concerns. This is how we will make the change. Structural change needs to be controlled by the people.

Although we have eleven official languages, there is pressure on us, as Black South Africans, to speak English or Afrikaans with proficiency if we want to secure a job. I have to work ten times harder to speak the language fluently enough. I am lucky enough to meet other race groups and learn to speak fluently. Others just cope by drinking. The government is supposed to save us. Instead, they are stealing from us.

Different challenges face different communities. One example is the issue about police stations: A huge Black community, Chesterville, has one police station. While the White and Indian communities across the road in Westville have numerous clinics and police stations. I want to influence policy.

I went to my old school where I grew up, only to find that there is no glass in the windows. People are sensitized to not having these conversations. They cope by avoiding because nothing will come out of it. We have a number of youths who have never left the township in their lifetime. All they know is misery and neglect. They cope. That is all they know. A lot has been left unsaid. The politicians who create dialogue don't share this. They manipulate the resources. This is the reality I live in. My child, who is seven years old, is taught in school that it is okay to get 30%. I am a parent and had apartheid passed on to me. I want to change the narrative. How do I do that if I ignore these issues? It makes me feel I never had an opportunity to talk about it.

We are the deliverers of hope, but there is sadness and anger. Not many of us think of South Africa as a transformed nation. How many of the people speak any of the African languages? We are asked to commit to a new culture. I would love to learn your language. But I do not even know my mother tongue and culture. I was robbed of it when at school. The schools did not have the resources. The difficulty of where we are is that there is so much that we have lost. A lot that is not acknowledged, that we have lost. I have a responsibility to have a collective impact. Yet I know that I speak in a vacuum as a Black South African.

VIGNETTE: JOANNE

As an Indian woman during apartheid, I was stuck in the middle. I was not Black; I was not White. In post-apartheid, we are still not Black enough for opportunities that are

available. Extreme poverty and drugs exist in the Indian communities almost to the extent that we numb ourselves of the pain. Violence is happening with no effective supporting systems. People are not informed.

The process of speaking about it is overwhelming—fear and confusion in experiencing the reality. How do you change that? A child that has repeatedly been abused. No differential parental styles. We are a community of poverty. Hanging on to hope is pivotal. Our community is not aware of any alternatives. I am one of the few lucky people. We were considered Black in terms of law. But our identity has shifted in a complicated way. It is not acknowledged enough. In theory it seems okay, but nothing has changed since apartheid.

As the listening circle concluded, the following words and phrases resonated with the circle keepers. The emotional wounds of pain, anger, frustration, powerlessness, confusion, uncertainty, feelings of being used and abused, manipulation, neglect, and being pawns in the game stood out clearly. The ideas that the institutional structure was corrupt, greedy, creating blockages, and being power mongers were present in many of the voices. Educational deficits in performance and language drew attention, while housing, health care, and basic services were neglected by the leaders in the government. There was a sense of hope that felt collective bargaining, intention, and changing the current narrative was possible.

These vignettes demonstrate the themes that impact the racial divide that continues long after apartheid discontinued in 1994. Listening circles allowed human beings to suspend judgment and listen to others' perceptions of an issue. The listening circle provides a safe structure that allows for the nurturing of differences perceived within a common focus. As Hanson and Mendius suggest, "harnessing the social circuits of the brain to enable us to transform even our relationships with our own self" becomes the major purpose of the three pillars of practice: to externalize, be mindful, and have empathy (2009, p. vi).

Learning to speak to our wounds and recognizing that we are responsible for healing ourselves is critical. Once we are able to hold others' perceptions in mind, we are more mindful of how we treat other humans. Our sense of identity is able to celebrate a wholeness in being human. Being global citizens requires intentional interactions that advocate humanity. Listening circles and compassionate witnessing invite structure and nurturing that encourage engagement as seen in the Relational Care Ladder. The purpose is larger than ourselves (See Figure 3 in Appendix D).

CONCLUSION

Systemic trauma is often silently passed from one generation onto another. This invisibility is accessed through perceptions and beliefs that are endured for two, three, and sometimes four generations. Transgenerational trauma for citizens and ex-citizens of South Africa continues despite the fact that apartheid was no longer a policy in 1994. Apartheid was systemic and historic harm that impacted generations to come with emotional memories and procedural impulses and behaviors. The impact of the nation's golden rule of "ubuntu" was challenged and exchanged for xenophobia. The recognition of human rights and dignity essentially remains an aspiration but not a reality twenty-five years later.

The Relational Care Ladder (see Figure 1 in Appendix D) identifies how we, as human beings, grow and develop to have dignity. At a macro level, governments and leaders need to be aware of continual movement within the four rungs of the ladder. Critical to human growth is structure, nurturing, engagement, and challenge. **Structure** of safe environments is a priority if we wish to feel *safe*. Governments/states and nations that create laws to *regulate*, need to be vigilant in how and what they impose. The second rung of the Relational Care Ladder is *nurture*. This is where our *self-worth* is acknowledged and matures. Denying an individual's contribution to a society does nothing to create the *awareness* of being worthy. The third rung of the ladder of needs is *engagement*, where *being present* and having conversations that allow individuals and communities to voice and be heard, allows the expression of *feelings*. This is critical for human development. When the first three rungs of the ladder are consistent and predictable, the fourth rung of the ladder, *challenge* allow citizens to empower self and others with grace. Empowering ourselves and others requires us to confront new and challenging experiences with a sense of belonging, having a voice, and a sense of agency. Using fair process, we are able to promote engagement, explanation, and expectation to a greater good for mankind (Kim & Mauborgne, 1997).

As cited by Hanson and Mendius (2009), the pillars of practice that counteract the poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion are engaging intentionally with mindfulness; and addressing misbeliefs or delusions with wisdom. Within these pillars of practice, we withhold judgment. With the advent of the internet and various social media platforms, withholding judgment is less practiced today. Quick, reactive responses are the norm.

Increasing awareness and opportunities for communities to speak to their "near experiences" about institutional and systemic harm is imperative. It is a call to leaders

to initiate listening circles and compassionate witnessing groups. Being human requires belonging, voice, and purpose. We must challenge institutions and governments that deny basic human rights to engage with their people. Institutional injustice discriminates and inflicts harm on normal human development, instilling superiority and privilege of one group above another. This serves to inflict harm, not only for that specific generation but for generations to come.

When we, as human beings, do not learn from our past because of greed, hatred, and illusions (Hanson & Mendius, 2009), we repeat the same atrocities that corrupt our hearts and souls. Staying mindful requires the ability to remain present in the moment. Using the practice of compassionate witnessing and listening could begin the journey if hope is to prevail. The wisdom for human beings to reflect and practice acceptance of difference before making judgements could and would make the world a better place.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I lived and worked as a White citizen in South Africa from 1946 to 2006. During the period 1948–1978, the nationalist government instituted more discriminatory laws of apartheid than ever in the history of the country. Learning how these laws have impacted my fellow South Africans has been heartbreaking and challenging, to say the least. My ignorance was primarily due to parents who protected my siblings and me from divisive political conversations. News was available through newspapers and radio, and television broadcasting was only made accessible in South Africa in 1978. Control at any level of a system, organization or country tends to remain rigid and inflexible to change. Hawkins (2004) purports that pride in a dominant culture will eventually self-destruct. He further encourages people and nations to have courage and willingness to engage without judgement so that differences may be celebrated without threat. My hope is for us to reach that willingness.



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Appendix A – Narrative Questions for Exploring Historic Trauma (Weingarten, 2003)

1. What is your chosen group's historical or chosen identity? (Nationality, ethnicity or religion).
2. How has the knowledge of your chosen identity been passed onto you?
3. How do you pass it on to others? Exactly? With modifications? What aspects are you aware/or unaware of?
4. What impact has it had on your life? Family? Community? Country?
5. What has been the hardest thing for you in speaking about it?
6. What would you wish to do with regard to passing on the identity?
7. Whose support would you need to enlist to accomplish your preferred relationship with this identity?

APPENDIX B: LISTENING CIRCLES (Smull, IIRP. 2019)

Agreement Norms

1. I recognize the facilitator as moderator.
2. I will answer only the questions that are asked.
3. I will speak when holding the "Talking Piece."
4. I will not comment on what others have said.
5. I can pass if I do not wish to share.
6. I will be respectful at all times.

Process

1. Open with a check in – a fun fact.
2. Read through the agreement
3. Choose the topic for the two questions
4. No more than 6 in a group.
5. Meta-discussion closure after the small group go-around.
"What words or phrases stood out for you as you listened?"
6. Close with "What did you learn, realize or were surprised by during our listening circle?"

Listening Circle

No more than 6 including moderator in one group. Each person is given 2 minutes maximum to address each question.

1. First Question: What impact does have on your life?
2. Second Question: What has been most difficult for you talking about this?
3. Meta-discussion: What word or phrases did you hear in our listening circle?
4. Large check out.

APPENDIX C: COMPASSIONATE WITNESSING PROCESS

The group is asked to appoint a timekeeper for yourselves.

Each session will be 90 minutes.

The process of compassionate witnessing will contain four circles:

1. Dialogue between facilitator & person (sharing common shock experience). (Time: 15 minutes)
2. Outside witnesses having a conversation about what they heard. (Time: 15 minutes)
3. Dialogue between the facilitator & person about the outside witness's comments. (Time: 15 minutes)
4. Meta -conversation with all participants. (Time: 15 minutes)

Circle 1 (Dialogue)

- Facilitator to ask the narrative map questions that are appropriate for the session
- Remember to ask extended questions in between e.g. How, what, whose, why.
- Remain neutral and curious.

Circle 2 (Outside witnesses)

- This must flow like a conversation between the participants.
- No advice must be given.
- Outside witnesses must respond to words and phrases the Person has used.
- Take note of the responses you have to the issues
- Ask questions of the person for them to answer later.
- Be respectful of the person's story.
- If you do ask another outside witness person how they handled a similar situation, remember to place it back with the identified person's story.

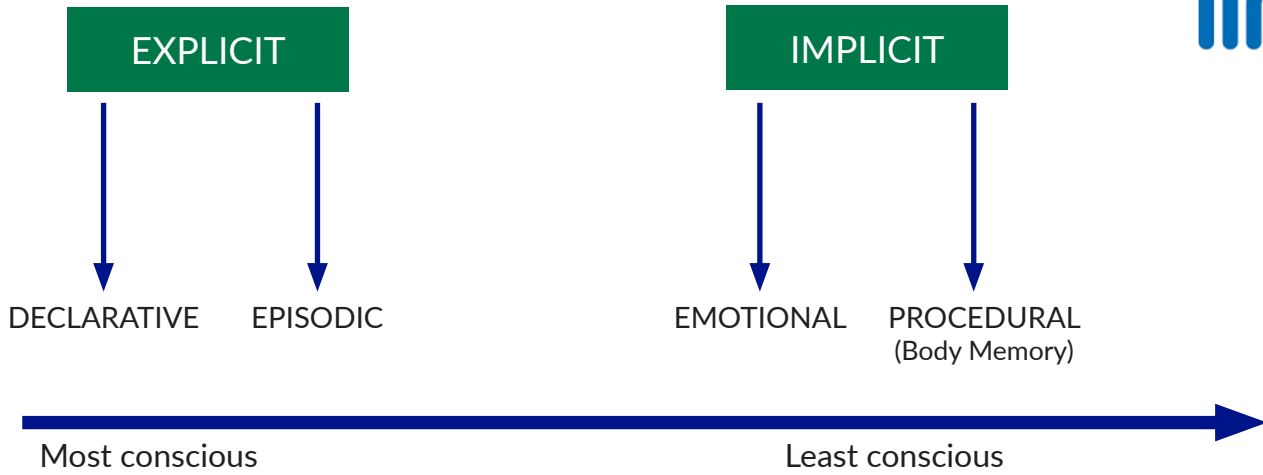
Circle 3 (Dialogue)

- The facilitator asks the person questions around what they have just heard:
- What did you connect with?
- Why?
- What did you think when so and so said this?
- Where is this taking you to now?

Circle 4 (All participants)

- What was it like for you telling your story?
- How did you feel as the facilitator?
- Open the discussion to the group where you are free to ask the facilitator why they asked certain questions;
- Comment on where you felt a shift happened in the compassionate witnessing?
- What was it that made the shift? Etc.

FIGURE 1 - TRAUMA AND MEMORY



SOURCE: (Levine, 2015, p.17)

FIGURE 2 - THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA

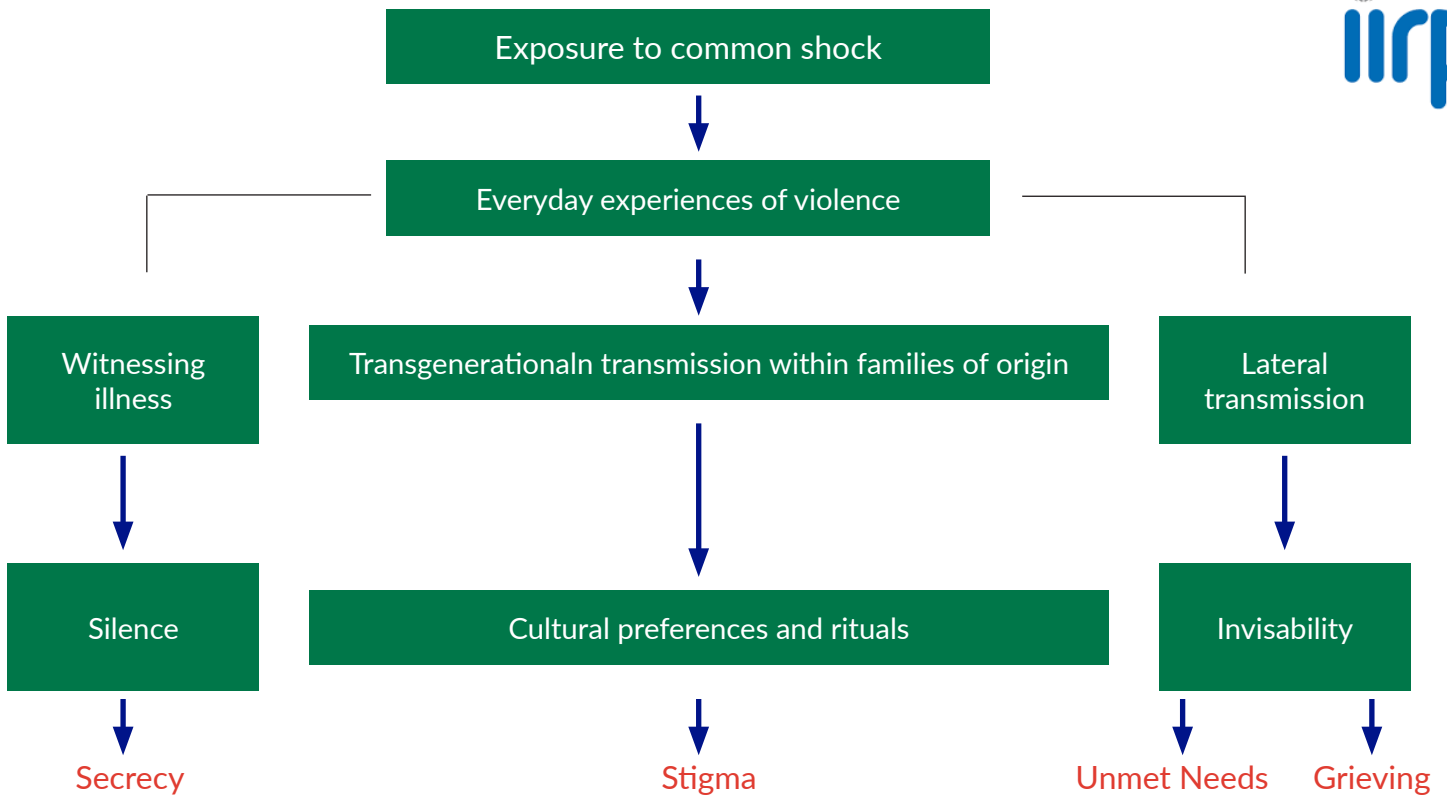


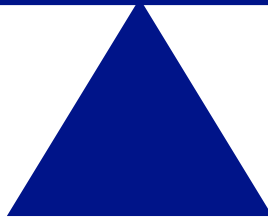
FIGURE 3 - VULNERABILITY



EMPATHY

SHAME

Open
Share
Communicate
Respect



VULNERABILITY

Closed
Isolation
Secrets
Invisibility

SOURCE: (Brown, 2015)

FIGURE 4 - THE RELATIONAL CARE LADDER

CLIENT NEEDS



EMPOWERMENT

CHALLENGE

Professional competencies
to be used:

Competence, mastery, play.

FEELINGS

ENGAGEMENT

Joy of companionship,
attunement, now moments.

AWARENESS

NURTURE

Security, Self worth, stress
reduction.

SAFETY

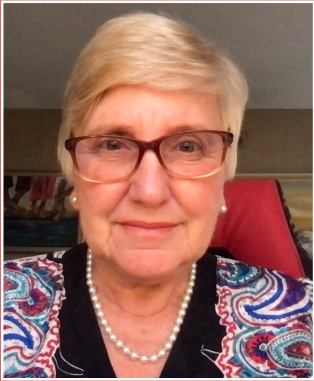
STRUCTURE

Safety, organization, and
regulation.

"SNEC"

SOURCE: (Rundell, 2017)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Frida Rundell, Ph.D., LPC, is a founding IIRP faculty member and professor. A committed teacher and practitioner, she brings extensive experience in Narrative and Solution-Focused Therapies to restorative practices and supports her students in mastering competencies related to life-space crisis intervention, adversity, and trauma. Prof. Rundell works directly with young people and their families, and involved with training and workshops for teachers and counselors in the IIRP model programs. Her current work involves using somatic experience to help traumatized children and families.

Frida has more than 50 years of experience working with children and families facing adversity, from youth with learning difficulties to those who are homeless, disabled, delinquent or suffering from AIDS. She initiated and developed an undergraduate degree program for child and youth-care professionals at Durban University of Technology, South Africa. She has also worked with IIRP community-based programs.

Frida is committed to empowering people and helping them achieve their potential. She has presented her work at seminars, workshops, and international conferences in over 10 countries. She earned her M. Ed. Psychology from the University of Natal, South Africa, and her Ph.D. in Community Psychology from the University of Zululand, South Africa. She is a licensed professional counselor in the USA.

Frida recently coauthored a chapter titled “Managing trauma: A restorative process” in the book *Refugee education: Integration and acceptance of refugees in mainstream society*.

Another publication is the IIRP Presidential Paper Series, featured *Processing Trauma: Using the Relational Care Ladder*.