White identity the context of increasing exposure to crime in post-Apartheid South Africa: A qualitative study.

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ABSTRACT:

The study is a qualitative investigation into how experiences of crime shape narratives of identity among young white South Africans in the context of increased levels of crime in previously "safe" white communities. Using discourse analytic methodology the study examines narrative expressions of identity as evidenced in the way the participants talk about themselves and about their experiences of crime in semi-structured interviews. In order to better contextualise the discursive terrain within which the white participants must organise their own discourses of "whiteness" the study draws on the work of prominent authors writing on the topic of white South African identity. The results are organised into 3 meta-narratives. Narrative 1 is entitled "Us whites are an endangered species" and communicates a sense of insecurity and the feeling that white identity is under threat. Narrative 2 is entitled "If I were racist, could I do this?" and is an intensely conflicted story about personal feelings of prejudice, and about how crime exacerbates this personal conflict. The third narrative is entitled "Where's the virtue in patriotism?" and communicates a sense of displacement as well as describing the search for a place to belong to in a crime ridden country, or a place not to belong to at all. The narratives are divided into various sub-categories for greater explanation of the interrelatedness between the different discursive constructions used in these narratives. In conclusion two general themes are extracted from the narratives that give insight into white experience of crime. One is the feeling that whiteness is a liability which possibly makes the white person more at risk, and the other is a considerable amount of moral conflict about personal feelings of prejudice. In general the participants found their whiteness to be a very uncomfortable aspect of their identity.

Keywords: whiteness studies; white identity; South Africa; crime.

INTRODUCTION

The policies of racial equality and reconciliation advocated by those political leaders who oversaw South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 has meant that the white population, while no longer wielding the same political power, has ostensibly been invited to participate in a new and fully inclusive democracy. What it means to be white in the post-apartheid context is very different to what it meant in the days when 'whiteness' was the site of institutionalised privilege. The question as to where exactly the white community must now fit into this brave new world, whilst leaving the legacy of apartheid behind them, is as complex as it is important, involving "one of the most profound collective psychological adjustments happening in the contemporary world" (Steyn, 2001, p. xxi). Whites are experiencing a situation of identity in flux, where social change has brought about the need to make massive revisions in the meaning systems that define white identity. This is particularly true of the younger generation who have inherited this remarkable socio-political circumstance and must interpret where they will fit into the new South Africa and how their whiteness may be different to the whiteness of their parents. As Steyn (2001, p. 149) points out "whiteness just isn't what it used to be*". Further compounding this massively complex process of identity construction is an increased exposure the crime (including violent crime) in the towns and cities, as well as in previously "safe" white communities (Dirsuweit, 2002; Lemanski, 2006). It is within this context that the study examines how experience of violent crime has, and is, affecting these processes of identity construction among young white South Africans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

White experience of crime

Empirical studies into the prevalence of crime in predominantly white communities over the last 10 years describe a dramatic increase in both violent and petty crime (Lemanski, 2006; Samara, 2003; Stone, 2006), and white declarations of no longer feeling safe in areas previously felt to be free from crime is well documented by authors such as Ballard (2004) and Van Rooyen (2000) who are both interested in white attitude research. In Allen's examination of how crime is experienced by a

group a white women in Johannesburg (2002) he reveals how they make sense of their experience by relying on highly racialised discourses about the criminal "other" and the black "other". Allen also draws a link between racist ideology and self-identity, he identifies various expressions of guilt and feelings that because whites are materially better off than blacks, blacks will always look to attack and rob whites simply out of spite. Ballard (2002) discusses discourses of fear which he believes have their origins in the political expressions of the Apartheid government which include an attitude that whites should fear the 'swart gevaar' or 'black peril' and always be wary of the black "other". He suggests that to some extent the collective fears of the white community are projected onto the racialised "other" who begins to represent all that is despised or feared. Even President Mbeki (quoted in the newspaper *The Independent on Saturday* on the 17th March, 2007) has publicly expressed similar sentiment, emphasising a link between the "deeply entrenched racism" of the white population and their perceptions of crime such that "every reported incident of crime communicates the frightening and expected message that the *kaffirs* are coming".

By contrast, Moller (2005) describes a different discursive strategy in which white experience of crime is expressed by narratives of futile resignation and an acceptance to "live in fear". Dirsuweit (2002) cites the use of security measures and the instalment of gated communities in white areas as evidence of fearful discourses that have resulted in a new "security aesthetic" becoming part of post-apartheid white identity. Van Rooyen (2000, p.26) states that "an estimated 1.5 million South Africans (mostly white) have left the country in the past few decades" and goes on to describe how narratives extolling the virtues of emigration is continually reinforced by popular white discourse about crime.

Whiteness studies

White identity is investigated in more general terms by Steyn (2001, 2004a, 2004b) and Ballard (2002, 2004) as well as Salusbury and Foster (2004), and although their focus is not wholly on crime these authors comprise some of the most seminal work on the topic of white identity in the new South Africa. Their contribution is made all the more substantial by their working within the conceptual framework of 'whiteness studies' which has have proliferated Europe and America during the end of the 20th

century. They contextualise white discourse in South Africa within the broader discourses of global 'whiteness' that have been identified by authors such as Saxton (1990), Roediger (1991) and Perry (2001), who in turn have been influenced by the earlier work of such seminal black scholars as W. E. B. Du Bois and Franz Fanon (Salusbury, 2003).

Steyn (2001) makes reference to what she describes as the Master Narrative of Whiteness which roughly describes the dominant story of "whiteness" and "otherness" that has been told across the globe for centuries. It revolves around discursive binaries which include stories about "the cultured white man versus the black savage", of "the Christian versus the heathen" and most particularly of "normal versus deviant". These and other discursive formulations that make up the Master Narrative of Whiteness have managed to perpetuate power relations of oppression along racialised lines with incredible force for many centuries (Steyn, 2001). The Results section discusses how the participants in this study have at various stages made use of the MNW making sense of their own experiences of crime.

METHOD

Theoretical Orientation

This study makes use of both discourse analysis and narrative analysis when reaching conclusions about the participants' own sense of identity in the context of violent crime. Through analysis of semi-structured interviews, patterns of "discourse" are identified in the language used by the participants when making sense of their own experiences of crime. This "sense making" is further analysed and discussed in an attempt to understand how it relates to their sense of identity as part of the broader white community. Put simply, the study examines the way in which the participants' talk about themselves as "white South Africans" in the context of a rising crime rate and their own direct or indirect experiences of crime. The epistemological position of this type of research believes that their specific use of language has implications about their personal psychology, as well as lending insight their relationship with the social world (Wetherell & Potter, 1998).

Foucault (1972, p. 49) describes discourse as practices in language that "systematically form the objects of which they speak" in such a way that they are "real" to the speaker. Much of discourse analytic theory is based on the work of Foucault who describes how discourse is created and constrained within a system of language, and that that system is the product of the social context within which language resides. In this way, if language reflects its context, then analysing the language that is used by individuals provides a greater understanding of that social context within which they reside. This attitude has lead many theorists to feel that language is the only legitimate site of investigation into social understanding (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999 cited in Salusbury, 2003).

Narrative analysis examines the ways in which experience is related in a 'storied' form (one which necessarily makes use of certain discursive formulations to tell the story or 'narrative'), and is able reveal insights into how the experience affects the individual's sense of self within the broader social context (Crossly, 2000). By identifying systems of meaning that inform the social identity of particular cultural groups the researcher is able to further explore the interrelationships between and within those groups, as well as their interaction (as a collective) within the greater social matrix of society (Parker, 2005). This research therefore attempts to contribute to a greater understanding of discursive interactions (told in storied form) within the young white South African community, as well as its own interaction within the greater social context of South African society. This makes the research essentially an exercise in social psychology, but one that draws from the theoretical framework of social constructionist thought and qualitative methodology.

Participants

I personally interviewed 8 young white South African students from the University of Cape and used a digital recorder to record their responses. The participants all understood the voluntary nature of their participation and signed consent forms (see Appendix A) to that effect. They also declared on the form that they had no objection to their responses being recorded provided that their identities remained protected. The eight participants were made up of 4 undergraduate and 4 postgraduate students.

They were all under the age of 24 and considered themselves to be white. At one stage or another they had all been victims of some type of crime while living in South Africa.

Interviews

The interviews took place in an empty classroom in the psychology department and were done on a one-on-one basis. The goal of qualitative interviewing is to produce the kind of "conversational interaction" between interviewer and interviewee that most closely resembles the sort of natural dialogue that would take place between ordinary people in everyday situations (Parker, 2005). As such, I encouraged the participants to speak freely and openly about they're own experiences of crime and their own identities. Appendix B outlines the proposed interview schedule which attempted to elicit conversation about experiences of crime and what those experiences meant to the participants both as individuals and as white South Africans. The interviews were then painstakingly transcribed and random pseudonyms were given to the participants in order to protect their identity. The result was 8 lengthy hardcopy documents which served as the text used for analysis.

Analysis of the text

Discourse analysis was used to identify clusters of "language content" and imagery (called discourse) used by the participants and which communicated a particular meaning for the participant in that particular context. According to Parker (1992) this meaning (or "system of meaning") gives ontological validity to the "object" that it describes and is therefore central to that participant's understanding of the world, and in particular the social world he (or she) finds himself in. Narrative analysis was used to interpret the participants' "storied expressions of self" in the hope of extracting "systems of meaning" which they use to construct their own social identity within the broader South African context. Narrative analysis methodology supplements discourse analytic theory when it suggests that narratives of the self are constructed by making use of "culturally available scripts" (Crossley, 2000). As such, the discourses that emerge from analysed narrative represent a dialectical relationship between self and culture. By analysing the relationship between these cultural scripts

and the language used by the white participants the researcher is able to delve deeper into the quality of their subjective experience. The analysis is therefore the process of teasing out various discourses that are used in narrative and by describing their dimensions and composition in relation to larger societal discourses better understand their interaction with the larger social context. A particularly dominant societal discourse relevant to this study was the Master Narrative of Whiteness (see Literature review) and the participants' discursive interaction with this narrative is discussed at length.

The issue of reflexivity

When analysing discourse (and when doing any kind of social research) it is important to consider how the researcher's own subjectivity may contribute to the final result. Qualitative methodology subscribes to the view that our perception of reality is always mediated by our own subjectivities, and that it is impossible to passively observe one objective reality, as if 'truth' were fixed and unchanging. As Parker (2005, p.27) has said:

> Every claim to objective truth is also simultaneously the reflection of
> the historically-embedded subjective position of the researcher in what
> they are studying (Buck-Morss, 1977). There is a dialectical
> relationship between researcher and researched. What we find and the
> sense we make of it are always a function of what we thought we
> would find and the position from which we try to make sense of it
> from.

During the analytic process I was forced to consider how my own subjectivity may have been affecting the results obtained, and thus the process of theorising over my own personal subjectivity was an integral part of the analysis. Unlike more traditional positivist social research, which attempts to control for and eliminate subjectivity, qualitative methodology seeks to actively engage with subjectivity in order to more accurately determine how it is reflected in the conclusions that are reached. By considering these issues of reflexivity I have hoped to move closer to that "kernel of truth" which more accurately reflects our shared social reality (Parker, 2005, p. 28).

As a white South African student myself, the fact that I fit neatly into the exact social category under investigation needed to be made explicit during the analysis process and specifically theorised over. I also took into account the effect that my being white may have had on the type of responses given by the participants, as opposed to the type of responses that may have been given to a say, a black person conducting the same interview. However, my own whiteness may have been an asset in this situation. My being white has probably encouraged the participants to be less conscience of political correctness and to speak as they normally would among their own white peers. It has probably helped give this research access to the type of everyday language informing the participants' own whiteness which would probably not have been communicated to a non-white investigator.

RESULTS

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed 3 dominant discursive constructions of meaning expressed in a "storied" form. Each of these stories (or narratives) are very much stories about being white in South Africa in the context of violent crime, rather than simply just stories about crime. Although different 3 "streams of sense making" (Steyn, 2001, p. 49) were evident from the analysis, there are no clearly demarcated cut off points between the narratives which are identified, and the discursive themes overlap and differentiate at various points. However, rather than lament the lack of clear boundaries between discursive themes the analysis actively engages with the variety of expression and attempts to draw conclusions about the interrelatedness of the different stories told. Furthermore in order to add richness and texture to the analysis each narrative is separated into sub-categories, or sub-stories, as different versions of the same narrative are told in different ways and with different levels of intensity at different instances.

Narrative 1 is called "Us Whites are an Endangered Species" and communicates a sense of insecurity and the feeling of white identity under threat in the new South Africa. It is a story told where "whiteness" and "otherness" are concepts inseparable from crime. Narrative 2 is called "If I were racist, could I do this?" and is the

intensely contradictory and conflicted story about personal feelings of prejudice, and about how crime exacerbates this personal conflict. Narrative 3 is called "Where's the Virtue in Patriotism?" and communicates a sense of displacement as well as the search for a place to belong in a crime ridden South Africa, or a place not to belong to at all. These narratives depict three different "storied expressions" about crime that are common, to a greater and lesser degree, to each of the 8 participants that took part in the study. The narratives identified are not the specific or explicit expressions of each individual participant, nor are they the consensus attitude among the participants. They are "meta-narratives" (Billig, 1988) that have been identified as being the common expression of meaning communicated to the interviewer (and at the same to communicated to the self) whilst talking about crime in South Africa. As they tell their stories about crime they also communicate stories about their personal and group identity.

Of particular interest during the analysis process is attempting to identify roughly where these narrative constructions originate from, as well as how the participants seem to make use of certain discursive repertoires in order to make sense of their experiences. In an attempt to understand ourselves we draw on the repertoires of sense-making devices that our culture furnishes, as such the participants' expressions of their own whiteness (in the context of violent crime) do not appear out of nowhere but are the result of careful selection and rejection of discursive repertoires and narrative constructions that are omnipresent in the communities and cultures within which the participants reside (Gergen, 1988). The individual's own unique use of certain combinations of discursive repertoires already available in society, told in a storied form, reveals information about that individual's personal identity.

NARRATIVE 1: "US WHITES ARE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES"

This story is about fear and anxiety and about constantly being at risk by virtue of being a white person. It explains how being a member of the white community in South Africa has the same connotation as being unwanted and dispensable, and as a result whites are at the mercy of a black majority who, if they aren't the violent criminals themselves, then certainly couldn't give care less if whites meet an unhappy

end at the hands of violent criminals. This story is told in three different ways and each sub-story generally revolves around the white person's own perceived personal agency to combat this constant threat; this "liability" that comes with being white. Of course, research into the factual circumstances of white South Africans today would suggest that being white can hardly be considered a liability. In all probability it may actually mean having access to a sustained and dominant socio-economic advantage that has remained firmly in tact after transition and into the new South Africa (Salusbury & Foster, 2004). However, that is not relevant in this study where the objective is to ascertain the perceptions, feelings and beliefs of the participants, whether what they say is objectively "true" or not has no relevance here. In the broader philosophical underpinnings of this type of research, "truth" or "fact" has almost nothing to do with personal psychology. People do not act on objective truths alone, they act on what they believe, and that is often far more significant for human interaction in society than those things that may be considered objectively "true" or not. With this in mind we can examine a phrase used by one of the participants which reveals much about her feelings of being white in South Africa.

> "I feel that being white in South Africa *is not a hugely bad thing*, it's not like: oh my gosh look at that, there's a white person, you never see those anymore! Well, *maybe one day it will be like that, you know?*"
> [Tammy (pseudonym)]

The excerpt here is clearly a joke, the participant isn't being serious, or at least doesn't intend to come across as seriously believing her imagined scenario. Nevertheless her qualifier at the end entertains this possibility *as being a possibility* and communicates her own personal anxiety and deep seated fears. "*Not a hugely bad thing*" immediately reveals that being white is definitely a bad thing for her, even if it isn't "*hugely*" bad. The interaction between fear and self assurance is quite evident from the language which she uses.

1. a) "It's just a matter of time"

There were many examples in the text where the participants were communicating feelings of absolute helplessness and abject fear; they believed that they were simply waiting their turn to become victims of crime. The words "*lucky*" or "*incredibly lucky*" were used repeatedly by several of the participants when referring to not yet having been a victim of violent crime. Many said that at was only a matter of time before they would fall victim themselves:

> "Everything's happened to my friends and family and stuff, I know people that have been hijacked, I know people who have been held at gun point, you know *the list goes on* and I'm just thinking *when is it gonna like, you know?* I think it's just a matter of time before, um, like it happens to me… so much has happened to my friends who are *exactly the same, like whatever, income or background that I have*, you know what I mean?" [Jennifer]

The fear is palpable in the continual listing of people and friends who have been victims of crime. Many of the participants said how the situation was always "*getting closer to home*" and that it "*just really gets to me*" or that "*I can't stand it anymore*" and the terror was often expressed in frustration and anger as the one girl who said that "*it just really f#%@s me off!*" In the above passage we notice Jennifer's use of hesitation as indicative of her fear, at one stage she finds it too difficult to even to finish the sentence "*when is it gonna happen to me*" preferring to say "*when is it gonna like, you know?*", it may well be that even saying it out loud is a frightening experience. Of particular interest is Jennifer's use of "*my friends who are exactly the same, like whatever, income or background*", here she is alluding to her whiteness but is very careful not to say so in so many words. While this theme is extensively discussed in Narrative 2 it is worth mentioning that "*like whatever*" would doubtful be used if she really did mean her income bracket and not her whiteness. Nevertheless, what she certainly is communicating is her fear of becoming a victim by virtue of her belonging to a certain group, and the fear exhibited in this particular story is never far from feelings of helplessness:

Interviewer: Do you feel safe where you live and when you go about your day?

Jennifer: No [giggle], not at all. *Which is really sad*, that's another thing, *it's really sad that you actually have to live like this.* Like I dunno, I just feel like, I mean like, *I wish it was different."*

The words "*it's really sad*" and "*I wish it were different*" reveal so much about the Jennifer's sense of agency. By calling something sad one is suggesting that the thing is worth pitying, that it is helpless and without recourse to better itself, if the crime situation were "terrible" or "appalling" then one would assume that something could yet be done about it, that it is "*sad*" reeks of resignation. Likewise, wishing for something intimates that it's not within one's own purvey to attain the goal, a wish suggests an appeal to some kind of external force or to fate. *It's just a matter of time* is certainly a sad story.

1. b) Crime is normal"

This story is also largely about resignation but taps into a kind of resilience unknown to the telling of the *It's just a matter of time*, it is a story of acceptance and desensitisation expressed by feelings of indifference towards crime. Any type of crime that doesn't involve danger to life and limb is immediately minimized, even belittled. Car break-ins "*happen to everyone*", cellphones being stolen are "*like, whatever*" and purse snatching is "*not really an issue*". One participant said of being mugged and stabbed that:

> "I don't know if it [the experience] affected me coz it just seems like the norm for me that people get mugged, like *you live in South Africa and you get mugged*. That for me is the norm so I don't think that like, it jolted anything in my life, it seemed like, ok, it was kinda like *my turn to get mugged*, if that makes sense?" [Sarah]

Another participant said:

> "Like I realize that I could be *the person* who gets mugged in Rondebosch *at that time*, walking *in that place* and I could be *the person* who then goes from there and gets mugged in Observatory

there aswell, *I could be the statistic*, you know, 5 places in a day. So for me there's no point in avoiding you know, just living a normal and functioning life because *I could equally be the person* that never gets mugged, even thought there was a mugging in that street the next day."
[Bobby]

Resigning oneself to becoming "*the statistic*" seems to suggest a kind of ironic acceptance of the status quo, it is a less intense reaction to the threat of crime but is not necessarily devoid of any less fear than *It's just a matter of time*. It seems to be a fairly convenient tool to deny the terror of becoming a victim of crime, it appeals to a sense of normality that removes a lot of anguish and despair: if it happens to everyone then it becomes less of a bad thing and less awful an experience. But perhaps more than this *Crime is normal*, by minimising the smaller crimes, reiterates the abject fear of the bigger and more deadly crimes to which the participants feel they are at risk. Petty crime is expressed as being nothing but a small annoyance or minor inconvenience, but labelling it so is embraced with such enthusiasm that it suggests by contrast an intense fear of something really terrible happening to them. Each experience of petty crime seems to be greeted warmly with an incredible amount of relief, the participants are happy to settle for the lesser of two evils rather than face the truly terrifying. The use of "*I've only*" or "*that's all that's happened to me*" is very common among the participants and suggest a deeper, darker fear of becoming a victim of more serious crime. It communicates a sense of helplessness and inevitability about the impending doom:

"I've *only had small things happen to me* like I've had my cellphone stolen, or my bag stolen, or um, house burglaries probably quite a few in my lifetime. Um, but in terms of something like a rape or a, I dunno, a shooting or a stab, or *something like that,* I haven't been a victim of *that sort of thing*." [Lindy]

Like *It's just a matter of time*, *Crime is normal* relates the experience of crime as very much a white problem, although there are some instances where it is openly conceded that crime is normal and that it happens to *everyone*, and not just white people. And yet that fact appears to be nothing more than a footnote to a very white story about the normality of crime in white areas:

"But we actually get like defensive about Joburg's crime reputation, but I mean like *it's got nothing to do with me living in a rich area*, *I don't live in a rich area*, I don't live in a hugely like, you know, closed off kind of area. There's a boom that's stopping people coming in but I mean, *you know how corrupt South Africa is* anyone can walk through, and stuff has been robbed, people have been robbed in that area, *so it's got nothing to do with that*, I just think you know Joburg is very much the same as Cape Town, crime is like everywhere". [Christine]

1. c) Do something about crime

This version of *Us whites are an endangered species*, in contrast to *It's just a matter of time*, reveals a strong sense of personal agency that the tellers of this story feel about being able to protect themselves from becoming victims of crime. It is a very pragmatic story that revolves around taking responsibility for yourself and not simply throwing yourself at the mercy of criminals:

"I've been on anti-hijacking courses and everything and I mean that course was *one of the best things*, it stuck with me, it was really, really useful. Because *I do feel vulnerable as a female, white, driving alone* a lot of the time. I will most likely panic in a situation, I will get scared and I will close up, and um probably be more, I would rather have the knowledge to do the right thing, i.e. don't pull into the driveway at night, go round the block a few times, change your path everyday, don't go the same routine everyday, because these people will follow you, and that sort of thing. You go to the ATM, you're aware of people around you, you don't draw too much money, rather go to a different ATM and draw more money and just make sure no one's following you, if they are go round, etc. *And that to me makes me feel comfortable and that's why I think positively that I haven't been affected by violent crime*". [Christine]

However, *Do something about crime* is not always spoken about in the encouraging terms that Christine uses, not everyone thinks as "*positively*" as she does:

"I lock my bedroom door *every single night*, all the doors have to be closed, windows closed, burgular bars, alarm set, *everything. And even now* I can't go to sleep if windows and doors are open at all, *I can't*, even if my cupboards are open it's like, no, can't go to sleep"

[Michelle]

The result is an interesting dependence on physical security measures in order to feel comfortable, although it's quite clear that Michelle doesn't feel very comfortable even with the security measures and it appears that she would be inconsolable without them. This type of preoccupation with security among white South Africans is the post-apartheid context has been well documented (Ballard, 2004; Dirsuweit, 2002) has been likened and living in state of constant vigilance that is not unlike a war zone (Van Rooyen, 2000). A kind of security aesthetic has begun to characterise the white psyche and has had a marked impact on the geography of modern South African cities (Dirsuweit, 2002). The implication is "that which is safe is good". However, given the racial geography of South Africa, "that which is safe" actually turns out to be "that which is separate". This preoccupation with installing security measures serves the function of removing white South Africans from the rest of South African society by creating "safe spaces" behind walls and barbed wire which may just as well be called "white spaces". This type of segregation has been termed "semigration" by Ballard (2004) where the white population rather than emigrating does the next best thing by removing themselves from South African society both physically and psychologically.

1. d) "Blacks are out to get us"

> "I'm *sorry if this is racist* or whatever but I do feel that, you know, I'll be driving and like the people, like *the black men selling stuff* on the side of the road will come and be like ahhh, you know, say very inappropriate things like "Oh Miss South Africa come home with me", I drives me up the wall! Being white I think they have this thing that they want to control you *they have an anger about, you know, white people* and you know it's just their reaction to me if I walk past them or on the road and that sort of thing so *as a white female, and my car looks expensive*, so that's the kind of fear that makes me feel vulnerable". [Christine]

If we examine the language used by Christine in this excerpt we notice that whilst taking a positive and pro-active approach towards crime she also tends to be very aggressive. Significantly *Blacks are out to get us,* as a version of the *Us whites are an endangered species*, is told in far more racial terms and is a fairly common story told to explain crime that is not unrelated to feelings of guilt about Apartheid and white

privilege (Allen, 2002). Rather than despairing at being under threat, this story mobilises even more discursive resources than *Do something about crime* to fight the psychological impact of crime. It would appear that by making use of more traditional discourses about race that teller is able to more fully understand his or her exposure to crime, feeling more empowered and less afraid. It is not clear whether a resistant and combative story requires a greater understanding of the enemy it faces, or whether a greater exposure to, and acceptance of, racial discourse has resulted in the more combative story. This, and other questions about racialised discourse is discussed at length in the next narrative which is called *If I were racist could I do this?*

NARRATIVE 2: "IF I WERE RACIST COULD I DO THIS?"

This story is a highly conflicted and confused tale about personal feeling of prejudice, it has very unclear boundaries and contradicts itself constantly. The teller of this story seems to be continually trying to convince himself (or herself) of something that he may not believe. During the interviews the participants all danced around the issue of prejudice as if it were some curious object both repulsive and attractive. Sometimes they would creep closer with fascination and at other times they would recoil in disgust. They seemed to continually flirt with racism, teasing and playing with the ideology as if entertaining the idea of infidelity against the more liberal ideology to which they were apparently committed. Indeed, at one time or another all of the young white participants in this study clearly stated their strong anti-racist beliefs, that they abhorred the atrocities of Apartheid and that they believe that "*everyone should be equal*"… that type of discourse. Nevertheless, the language which they used when making sense of their own experiences of crime, and about their own whiteness, indicated a heavy reliance on parts of the old Master Narrative of Whiteness (MNW) mentioned in the literature review. Perhaps more significantly, while making use of the MNW in order to understand their own experience, the participants at the same time frequently challenged their own interpretations during the interview itself. One participant even announced that she was "having a little breakthrough here" as she pondered the root cause of crime in South Africa. *If I were racist could I do this?* is neither one thing nor the other: at certain stages this narrative relies heavily on the MNW to explain crime and whiteness, and at other times the MNW is rejected as new and different discursive interpretations are constructed in order to provide meaning.

2. a) "I'm not a racist, but…"

The teller of this story describes the difficulty he or she finds in expressing negative views about any type of racial issue and the conflict here seems to stem from a preoccupation with trying to keep within the boundaries of political correctness. Whether this concern is due to a social desirability bias in answering the interview questions, or whether it may be a type of self censure and personal disapproval at the type of words that seem to be coming out of the participant's own mouth, is not clear, more than likely it is a combination of the two. Whenever prejudiced comments, or negative comments aimed at the black other, or even when unpatriotic sentiment is uttered, the teller of this story prefaces his or her comment with a disclaimer. Phrases such as "*Look I don't want to sound racist, but…*", and "*I don't really know the politically correct way to say this, but…*" serve to indemnify the speaker from moral censure while at the same opening the floor for the type of comments heavily influenced by the MNW and often highly prejudiced.

> "No, I don't know, I think that if I, if I wasn't such an optimistic person *I might say* it [crime] *is definitely* gonna get worse. Our government's doing *absolutely* nothing about it. They're *completely useless*, they're *so corrupt*, you know and, but I'm reluctant to say those things. Although *realistically* I know that I lot of people in the government are corrupt, and they're <u>not</u> [emphasises this with a firm tap on the table] doing anything about it. So… can I see it getting better? No, *but I'm reluctant* to be negative like that". [Lindy]

Lindy's statement here highlights the conflicted nature of the entire *If I were racist could I do this?* narrative as well as more specifically showing how her use of language reveals more than she may be wishing to get across. The phrase "*if I wasn't such an optimistic person I might say*" is used to indemnify her against moral censure because her negative attitude towards the government could be construed as racist *if she were* saying so, but she neatly removes herself from culpability by declaring that she isn't saying so. Similarly the word "*realistically*" in this excerpt, and other phrases such as "*to be honest*" and "*actually*" generally precede the type of discourse which the speaker fears might produce moral censure. Lindy's use of several absolutes such as "*totally corrupt*" and "*completely useless*" indicates that she feels

very strongly about what she has to say and highlights the contradictory nature of her story; if she really was "*such an optimistic person*" it is doubtful that she would use such emphatic language when describing a rather pessimistic scene.

2. b) "Racism has nothing to do with me"

A very common discursive construction that is well documented (Steyn, 2001; 2004, Van Rooyen, 2000, Salusbury & Foster, 2004) is a kind of moratorium on racial discourse exercised by white people in the new South Africa. That construct of whiteness held so dear to those who fully embraced the MNW during the Apartheid years is now thrown away whole heartedly by proclaiming that humans are all equal and that we should all be colour-blind. Phrases such as "*what does the colour of a person's skin have to do with anything?*" or "*I don't see myself as white or black, I'm just a person*" not only serves to disassociates the speaker from prejudice but at the same time minimises the very real inequities and oppressive practices still present in South African society. Many social psychologists and academics would argue that being a black or white person in South Africa is just as relevant an issue as it was during Apartheid, only that the specific implications are necessarily different (Mkhize, 2004; Ratele, 2004, Steyn, 2001). It would seem that the tellers of this story are not unaware of the implications of being white and more than likely use the discourse as a means of denying any kind of responsibility for being white and for reaping the benefits associated with whiteness (Allen, 2002; Steyn, 2001). This type of discourse was often used by the participants, and on occasion its use could be identified more from what wasn't said than from what was:

> "I just think that um, I dunno, you know *I never* lived through the Apartheid, so, I mean I was a baby. You know *I didn't, I wasn't,* I just didn't know what was going on at that stage. I was *too young*. But I think that, and I, and *I certainly don't know much about it*, I should know more about it, but I don't." [Lindy]

Another way of constructing this discourse is to differentiate yourself from white prejudice by admitting that racism does happen among *certain* white communities but that it certainly has nothing to do with you. Some of the participants did this by

quickly drawing lines between themselves, as English-speaking whites, and Afrikaans people who were generally considered "*more racist*". Others like Michelle below spoke about racial issues as something external to her, she speaks about "*the whole race thing*" as if it were an object that is in no way her own:

> "When they broke into my house originally they were talking in English, and if they were talking in English then they probably weren't Xhosa *or whatever*. So then that like *totally threw the whole race thing out of the window*" [Michelle]

2. c) "That's not what I really mean"

This story describes the conflict experienced by the teller in trying to interpret crime and whiteness outside of the influence of the Master Narrative of Whiteness. While trying to construct new and progressive discourses to explain their own experience the tellers of this story continually slip up and fall back into the old MNW and then berate themselves for it. It is a story of moral dilemmas and contradictory influences where the teller is left entirely confused and uncertain about his or her own whiteness in the new South Africa.

> Sarah: And you know the whole, you know those two black guys [the people who mugged Sarah], and I think you know I worked very consciously to make sure I didn't fall into, you know, stereotyping black people… I dunno where it comes from, but there is *that linking* of the black man to crime, so I have to try and *consciously work at it* to make sure I didn't build up that stereotype.
>
> Interviewer: Is that because of your moral beliefs or your political beliefs or…?
>
> Sarah: Ja, just because I knew that was, *that was wrong*! I was racist! So, but it did come, it did like, I did have racist thoughts, and *I still do* but I have to, *I have to make sure* I'm self aware of it, and conscious of it and break it down.

While Sarah describes consciously fighting against "*that linking of the black man to crime*" Bobby describes the logical appeal of this type of discourse:

> "I think every time you see in the newspaper some kind of crime, and there's a coloured person or black person then that, sort of, *reinforces*

your belief and, *sort of gives you ammo* because it sort of justifies *that way of thinking.*" [Bobby]

Bobby is quick to differentiate himself from "*that way of thinking*" and yet there is a small contradiction in his use of "*your belief*" just briefly beforehand. It is quite clear from both of the excerpts that the participants are distressed by their own apparent prejudice; they seem conflicted and unable to reconcile their attitudes with their moral convictions. More than the first two versions of *If I were racist could I do this?*, *That's not what I really mean* more actively engages with this internal conflict which is centred around there own whiteness, and the story is one that is openly about conflict rather than denial or deception.

This internal conflict is likely the result of an antagonism between the racist traditions of MNW and the stories of equality and a new and cooperative rainbow nation for all races in South Africa. *If I were a racist could I do this?* describes how the young white participants in this study, when talking about crime, are attempting to construct new narratives of whiteness in the post-Apartheid context . While heavily conflicted and less blatantly prejudiced these new narratives still seem to rely very heavily on the racist traditions of the MNW. Why, 13 years on from political transition, these young white participants still cling so heavily to the MNW to explain their experiences of crime is a pertinent question. However, it is perhaps not that complicated as it would seem. Tammy, in her excerpt below, quite explicitly describes how her own internal conflict is influenced by her family and doubtless her parent's generation who have been more heavily exposed to the MNW.

"I mean personally I wouldn't go out with a black person, not that I have anything against black people, it's just that I, well I, I mean *apart from the fact that my father would come at me with a shotgun*, I mean the culture thing just gets in the way." [Tammy]

NARRATIVE 3: "WHERE'S THE VIRTUE IN PATRIOTISM?"

The participants who tell this story are very preoccupied with the idea of patriotism but their thoughts are very conflicted and, much like the teller of the *If I were racist could I do this?,* this story seems very unsure of its own conclusions. The teller if this

story makes use of many of the same discursive constructions in *If I were racist could I do this?* but is more primarily concerned with the future of South Africa and his or her own place in it. Many of the comments and phrases used in this narrative were prompted from the question: How do you see your own future, as a South African?

> *Scared an anxious, really worried*. I mean me personally, *I love South Africa, I mean I love everything about it*, I can't, *I can't see myself living anywhere else* you know, it makes me feel sad as well, that *such a beautiful country could just fall flat completely down because of crime*... That's probably why you find a lot of people are leaving South Africa, but then it's like, you know, "you have to be proudly South African"! But *how can you be proud of a country that's falling down because of crime?* [Tammy]

3. a) "The country's going to hell"

This narrative is characterized by a very strong Afro-pessimistic sentiment and is well documented by authors who have identified the type of white discourse which either extols the virtues of emigration (Van Rooyen, 2000) or semigration (Ballard, 2002). This story is generally told with the same feelings of despair which are communicated in *Us whites are an endangered species* but is less about white fear and more about a lack of faith in the new government. Much like the teller of *If I were racist could I do this?* this story is careful not to use the type of (racist) language that might invite moral censure, but once again their own peculiar use of language often betrays their intention.

> Our government's doing absolutely nothing about it [crime]. *They're* completely useless, *they're so corrupt*, you know and, *but I'm reluctant to say those things*. Although *realistically* I know that a lot of people in the government are *corrupt*, and they're <u>not</u> [emphasises this with a firm tap on the table] doing anything about it… and my dad sees this country becoming sort of like Zimbabwe, he thinks all the whole government situation is *totally corrupt*… and I think he's had the experience of watching, like, such a booming economy, and ahh, *then suddenly this corrupt government comes* into control, and everything falls to pieces" [Lindy]

If we have a look at this excerpt from Lindy's transcript (parts of which were used as an example in *I'm not a racist, but…)* her reference to the South African government is rather revealing. While checking herself to not come across as racist she also conveniently makes use of the word "*corrupt*" to mean more than moral or financial dishonestly. Any kind of negative statement about the government is simply labeled "*corrupt*" as if that were it's only fault. However it is clear that Lindy is upset about more than just the government's corruption, she speaks about incompetence ("*totally useless*") and links her father's view about Zimbabwe's inability to manage its economy to the South African situation. Corruption may contribute to these failings but it is unlikely that Lindy really believes "corruption" to be the soul reason. What she is actually doing is constructing another meaning for the word corrupt, which when read in the context of her final statement "*then suddenly this corrupt government comes into control and everything falls to pieces*", is difficult to interpret any other way than as black…"then suddenly this *black* government comes into control". This assumption is corroborated by her use of "they" when referring to the government in "*they're useless*" or "*they're corrupt*", rather then "it is corrupt" or "it is useless". The word "they're" serves to other herself from the government while at the same she is able to rally around her own whiteness by assuming to have some kind of greater moral insight into the situation the other. Since the MNW tends to define whiteness by what it is not, rather than what it is (Steyn, 2001), anything other than white is almost always black, and "corrupt" is not the opposite of white.

3. b) "I'm getting outta here"

Van Rooyen (2000) discusses many different versions of this particular story in his book *The New Great Trek* which describes a massive white exodus from South Africa by citizens who either no longer feel secure enough to stay or feel that they have no future in the country. As with all the different versions of the *Patriotism* narrative, this is a highly conflicted story characterised by torn loyalties and contradictory language.

> "Gee, I dunno hey, well, I think that, *South Africa's always gonna be home, but* I don't think I'll live here" [Michelle]

There is quite clearly a very strong sense of patriotism among the participants, or if it is not patriotism, then a certain sense of moral duty. Where exactly these moral convictions come from is difficult to surmise. In the *If I were a racist* narrative the antipathy between the MNW and constructions about equality and non-racialism is clear, and we can also imagine a very tempestuous intra-family discursive space where the older generation would typically rely more heavily on the MNW to explain crime. Here the conflict seems to be less about race and more about morality (in all of its vagaries). The story is about the brave and the cowardly and describes the shame of abandoning the country and the guilt of not staying put in order to fight the problem of crime. It is however likely that this sense of guilt has been influenced by discursive formulations made by those people in South Africa who have attracted a type of moral authority by virtue of their own experience and example. Nelson Mandela, quoted in the Sunday Times on the 13th of September 1998, has said that "we are convinced that real South Africans are being sorted out… in the process of emigration" (Van Rooyen, 2000, p. 115). The sentiment expressed by the likes of Michener (1971, p. 197) when he says that "a man who changes his country is like a dog who changes his bark… not to be trusted" certainly adds to the feeling of moral culpability. Jennifer, with her hesitations and "*I dunno's*", communicates the sense of confusion and uncertainty experienced by the tellers of this narrative:

> Jennifer: I want to leave, as soon as I get my degree, you know, I'm outta here. Also, *I dunno, I know that's probably the wrong thing to say.*

> Interviewer: Oh no, there are no right and wrong answers…

> Jennifer: Ja in *your thing* there isn't, but, *I know that in actual fact it's like, ja* if I leave I'm just being one of those people who are just leaving and not, like, making a difference and helping, *but ja, like, I dunno*.

3. c) "You just have to have faith"

The teller of this story formally announces his or her commitment to the country, and despite the "liabilities" of whiteness this individual will persevere none the less. Unlike the teller of *I'm outta here* this person is definitely not leaving and doesn't

experience the guilt of a coward, on the contrary he or she is very proud of the valiance displayed. Nevertheless the incredible force with which this narrative asserts its moral rectitude suggests discursive constructions that are similar to that of martyr, rather than to that of a fighting soldier.

> "I'm extremely positive about South Africa, and *I try* and be sort of, I just love this country so *I don't let it get me down…and it's hard*, because I've made a conscious commitment to this country, you know it's really important to love your country… So I think, you know, you either stay and *try and maintain a positive outlook as much as possible*, and like *obviously being realistic*, I'm not gonna be unrealistic, but um, in a sense I kinda just want to say, you know, *if you feel that strongly about it, go! Leave! Why are you staying here*?" [Lindy]

The language used by Lindy is highly contradictory, and the aggression that she displays towards those (white) people that have chosen to leave smacks of jealously rather than disapproval. It is almost as if she regrets her moral commitment and wishes that she could embrace the *Endangered Species* narrative, but has rather decided to suffer in noble silence because it is the right thing to do. She continually talks about "*trying*" to maintain a positive outlook and "*choosing*" to be positive as if it were against her better judgment. And yet this analysis is perhaps a bit harsh, *You just have to have faith* is not exclusively an ironic title and there are those with genuine altruistic intentions who bemoan the lack of faith in the country. Christine, below, says that the *The country's going to hell* and *I'm outta here* narratives (which she calls "*that sort of thing*") just really is the type of talk that just really "gets to her".

> "I mean, just, you have so many people saying "Oh, it's not gonna work, this country's gong to the shit, if we can leave let's go, if we can't then let's just move to an area where it might not affect us", and that sort of thing, which is really, oh, *it just really gets to me*!"
>
> [Christine]

And yet Christine's words still sound very much like a person trying to convince herself of something she may not belief. Even though she describes "*that sort of thing*" in order to complain about it, her attention to the specifics of those discourses indicates a certain acknowledgment of their logic, even if she may not agree with them on moral grounds.

CONCLUSION

Summary of findings

All the participants seem to exhibit a great fear of becoming victim of crime but different participants choose to deal with this fear in different ways as they tell different stories to explain, or explain away, the problem of crime. Many choose to employ the kind of racialised discourse advocated by the Master Narrative of Whiteness in order to make sense of seemingly senseless acts of criminality. These discourses are never far from feelings of guilt (*Blacks are out to get us*) or shame (*I'm getting outta here*) and create an incredible amount of personal anguish. Sometimes these discourses help promote a sense of personal agency (as in Christine's version of *Do something about crime*) and empower the participants psychologically to fight their fear of crime. It is the story of "rather the enemy you know", but if the enemy is explicitly recognised as being the "black other", then the logical progression is to continue accessing the MNW in order to explain crime. The issue here is that the participant starts noticing himself (or herself) using racist language and begins questioning whether he may in fact be a racist or not. His moral convictions then come into play and a discursive tug-of-war starts happening in the participant's psyche while he either accesses or rejects elements of the MNW in order to explain crime. They experience moral disgust when they begin to appreciate the logical appeal of the MNW (*That's not what I really mean*) and yet seemingly in spite of themselves they continually find themselves using the kind of language which might well make them "a racist". In order to combat this and to protect themselves from public disapproval they either deny their association with the MNW (*Racism has nothing to do with me*) or continually check themselves not to come across as racist (*I'm not a racist, but…*), but so often the language they use betrays their intention. Some of the participants have indicated that a lot of the discursive tension originates from family influence (such as Tammy in *If I were racist could I do this?*) where the older generation rely more heavily on the MNW to explain crime, and this includes discourse about the future of the country (*The country's going to hell*). Those who refuse to access the MNW have typically explained crime in two ways, the first is in

terms of complete resignation and fear (*It's just a matter of time*) or with discourse that is wrapped in denial (*You just have to have faith*).

Too white for comfort

When read together the 3 narratives reveal in more general terms how the participants' interpretation of crime relates to their own sense of whiteness in the new South Africa. The result is one over-arching story about what it means to be white in South Africa in the context of increasing exposure to crime, and the tale is not a very happy one. Almost every single sub-narrative is filled with contradictory language and the type of discourse that communicates fear and uncertainty. The participants seem to be stuck in the middle of a discursive mêlée that pulls them in different directions with different factions fighting for influence. From the results it would appear that the participants' whiteness affects their understanding of crime in two specific ways. One is that their own whiteness places them more at risk crime and that this is either because feelings of guilt and shame at being white, or because MNW tells them that the black other is out for revenge. The second is that they're own whiteness seems to suggest to them that they might in fact be "racist" and this is a very uncomfortable thought. Because of their moral convictions they continually try to shed themselves of this association but often despair when they find themselves using apparently "racist" language in spite of themselves. The relationship between their moral convictions and the discursive forces of the MNW is a highly conflicted and uneasy one, and one that seems to cause a lot of personal anguish. Regardless of which particular narrative construction the participants' choose to rely on it is clear that when discussing the topic of crime their own whiteness tends to make them feel very uncomfortable. They are, as it were, too white for comfort.

Limitations and further research

Issues of generalizability are not relevant in research of this kind as the identification of one narrative is evidence enough to show that that story *is being told* in the country and that these types of discourse do exist (Steyn, 2001). Nevertheless the sample in this study was very limited and it would have been useful to interview a cross-section of white South Africans from different backgrounds in order to get a better feel for the

type of stories that are being told about whiteness and crime in South Africa. The fact that this research is only an Honours level project has meant that time and resources were very limited, following this research into Masters level would certainly provide opportunity for more thorough and fully formed conclusions.

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