INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: IS CULTURAL CONVERGENCE POSSIBLE?

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ABSTRACT

As the media confirms the growing gap between citizens with different ethnic or racial origins in certain European countries, the lack of meaningful intercultural interaction within the Rainbow Nation in South Africa is even worse when recent occurrences are taken into consideration. Acting on erroneous perceptions and irresponsible labelling of people can pose a significant danger to tolerance and peaceful co-existence in South Africa; it could even be a threat to democracy. This article endeavours to reflect on the "climate" which would enhance or prevent interracial communication, in particular. The qualitative and post-structural approach of Iben Jensen (2008) has been applied. The aim of the model is to allow the researcher to "think through an intercultural communication process and reflect upon it from a new perspective". The proposition can be made that the possibility of meaningful interracial communication is slim, unless the races take the different contexts within a democracy into consideration, not misuse the power or lack of power of their position, avoid stereotyping, put the past behind them, communicate in a cultural sensitive manner about "emotional topics" and ask the question: Do pronouncements and the meaning attached to them change if it is communicated by someone from another race?

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INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM ORIENTATION

"You can love who you are without hating those who you are not" – Kofi Annan (Jackson 2010: 8). Participation in political and social life is a fundamental value, which is supposed to have a meaningful and permanent impact on the quality of human life. This would be the theoretical ideal in any country and community, but especially in a multi-cultural context. However, the harsh reality and the principle of heterophily, in which "birds of a feather would rather flock together", predicts the opposite (Dodd 1994: 232).

As the media confirms the growing gap between citizens, with opposing viewpoints, of different ethnic and/or racial origin in certain European countries, the lack of meaningful interracial interaction within the Rainbow Nation in South Africa sometimes appears even worse. The Rainbow Nation metaphor implies a degree of blending of the different colours to form a coherent rainbow. The ideal of convergence would be a blending of cultures, within a context of cultural relativism. According to Jandt (2007: 282), in the convergence model, (intercultural) communication would ideally be a process where information is shared by two or more individuals who converge toward a greater degree of mutual agreement. Most importantly, though, is to develop an improved relationship between them, regardless of whether they agree on relevant issues or not. In addition, one could strive for greater accommodation of each other's cultural beliefs and values.

In his opinion piece Scholtz (2009: 6) refers to Prof. Wasif Shadid's farewell speech at the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands where he said that even the people from the Netherlands, who take pride in their tolerance towards differently-minded people and different cultures, have changed their tolerant stance towards "a form of racism". Scholtz furthermore refers to Julius Malema, the former leader of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) and the current Commander in Chief of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), as a real threat to tolerance and peaceful co-existence in South Africa and mentions that Malema could even be considered a menace to democracy. The same could be said of the former Deputy President of the ANCYL, Ronald Lamola, who propagates violence and even war (not communication or negotiation) to return the land to the black majority (Louw-Carstens 2012: 1).

An opinion poll in 2009, amongst a representative sample of all South Africans, also indicated an unwillingness and even an aversion to interact with a culture or racial group other than their own (Gerrits 2009: 8). The Spear saga (which refers to a much-maligned painting of President Jacob Zuma) and the issue of racism is also relevant in this context.

In his reflection, Burger (2008:14) claims that since 1990 there has been greater interaction between different races, but he typifies the superficial nature and mere

formal functionality of the contact with no real deeper knowledge of each other, let alone intimate relationships and real friendships. Thus, it seems there is little proof of real convergence.

This research endeavours to explore, within this briefly described context above, the issue regarding interaction between citizens of different racial origin. Exploratory research has been done to achieve the following objective: *To explore and reflect on the "climate" which would enhance or even prevent convergence within the context of interracial communication.*

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

For the purpose of this article, interracial communication may be seen as a subset of intercultural communication, where the transactional process of message exchange happens between individuals and/or groups in a situational context, and where racial differences are perceived as a salient factor by all communicators or at least one of the participants, whether it is an individual or a group (cf. Orbe & Harris 2008).

The concept of race is problematic, discursive and surrounded by controversy, as racial classifications are mostly arbitrary, depending on the objectives of the classifier. Most classification systems divide humans into at least four groups, primarily according to physical features and skin colour: red, yellow, black and white (Orbe & Harris 2008: 25). Much can be said about the concept, but the significant fact is that "as long as people believe that differences in selected physical traits are meaningful, they will act on those beliefs, thereby affecting their interrelations with others" (Marger 2005: 23). Thus, race is part of culture, but a person's culture is more than his/her race. In South Africa most would generally consider the main races to be blacks, whites, Coloureds and people of Eastern or Middle-Eastern origin. For the purpose of this article the focus is limited to the black-versus-white groups, since the major incidents concern these two races. It could be claimed that it is not the physical and language differences as such, but the value that communicators attach to these differences and the influence on their communication or even lack of communication that cause problems in interracial communication (cf. Sonn 1996: 6).

Intercultural/racial communication can be viewed and discussed from different theoretical perspectives. The post-structural approach of Iben Jensen was selected for this article. She proposes a model of applying four "analytical tools", which are suitable to intercultural/racial communication, especially in complex societies such as South Africa. The aim of the model is to let the researcher "think through an intercultural communication process and reflect upon it from a 'new' perspective" (Jensen 2008: 6).

The four analytical tools will be briefly discussed within the context of occurrences in South Africa where the black-versus-white issue surfaced.

Jensen's model

Position of experiences

This concept focuses on the subjective experiences of the communicators, which are related to the social position of the person or group in society. The person communicates with a "world" perception based on past and more recent experiences. The literature reflects that these experiences can be personal and include mediated experiences via radio, television or newspapers. The social position relates, amongst others, to aspects of gender, ethnic majorities/minorities, race, political affiliation (ruling party or opposition), and socio-economic status. According to Jensen (2008: 7), relevant questions would be the following:

- Where and how in the communication does the actor relate his/her experiences?

- How do different subject positions influence the actor's way of positioning him/herself in relation to culture or power?

- In which ways does the actor's social position influence the actor's experiences and his/her interpretation of the communication process?

Cultural presuppositions

Presuppositions refer to the perceptions, knowledge, experiences and the affective component which communicators have of cultures/races different to their own. It would include the stereotyping of the other, based on the communicator's own culture's value system, as well as the understanding and interpreting of discourses in society. These presuppositions concern the categorising or labelling of "the others". According to Jensen (2008:7), the questions to identify this concept could be the following:

- How are "the others" described?

- How does the description and interpretation of "the others" denote a particular culture's own values?

Cultural self-perception

This concept focuses on the perception the communicator has of his/her own racial group and the extent or degree to which the communicator identifies with his/her own group. This concept is to a certain extent the counterpart of the cultural presuppositions. In practice this enables the researcher to ask:

- ♦ What cultural communities does the actor identify with?

- ♦ Does the actor identify himself/herself as distinct from other cultural communities?

- ♦ Does the actor idealise his/her own cultural community?

Cultural fix points

Cultural fix points are the focal points in communication where the participants represent a specific view on a certain topic. It requires that involved individuals or groups identify with this topic and also position themselves on the issue within the discussion, either positively or negatively. Within this concept one would be able to identify certain patterns in the conflicts that are salient in a given period of time. The questions to be asked are:

- ♦ What topics provoke emotional statements?

- ♦ Is it possible to identify a point of disagreement?

RESEARCH METHOD

The above-mentioned questions have been applied to crucial events that occurred during the past few years, with reference to well-known political figures as well as ordinary citizens. Given that communicators do not act in a vacuum, the recent and past socio-political context is taken into consideration.

This method is qualitative and exploratory in nature, in the sense that certain race-related occurrences – as mediated by the newspapers *Beeld*, *Sowetan* and *City Press*, amongst others – have been scrutinised to reflect on the "mediated picture" of the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the two racial groups regarding these issues, either as individuals or as part of an identifiable group. General comments from academics and media commentators will also be given in additional support of the findings. First the different occurrences and declarations will be set out, which will be followed by reflective argumentation with Jensen's model as theoretical framework.

The first step was topical coding (cf. Richards 2009: 93-113) to select all the articles from the above-mentioned newspapers that are race-related. In constructing a corpus the sampling was purposively aimed at selecting the articles in which the perceived differences of race are an integrated aspect of the communication behaviour (Flick 2009: 258).

The second step involved analytical coding to link the examples to one or more of the analytical tools of Jensen's model. Analytical coding refers to "coding

that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning" (Richards 2009: 102) of the relevant examples. Qualitative researchers who use written texts as their data "do not try to follow any predefined protocol in executing their analysis" (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori 2011: 530). The researcher endeavours to draw a picture of the presuppositions that constitute the "cultural world" of the communication behaviour of the actors of "which the textural material is a specimen" (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori 2011: 530). This can also be called axial coding, in order to identify and relate (sub-)categories to the four analytical tools of Jensen's model; thus, to identify the underlying racial issues to obtain an understanding of the possible rationale for the actors' communication conduct (cf. Flick 2009: 310-312).

The third step involved a synthesis, based on inductive reasoning culminating from the analytical coding.

Context

Specific occurrences

One relevant event is the reaction to the painting The Spear, by artist Brett Murray. It is a portrait of President Jacob Zuma in the pose of Lenin, with exposed genitals. According to Charl Blignaut, an art critic, it could be interpreted metaphorically as the naked emperor or taken literally as a man unable to control his sexual appetite (Blignaut 2012). President Zuma has had several extramarital affairs, impregnated a former friend's daughter, and was involved in a rape charge.

The painting evoked an extraordinary reaction from the ANC, which petitioned the court to close the art exhibition and threatened to boycott *City Press* if the image was not removed from its website. The vandalised painting was subsequently withdrawn from the exhibition. Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, and Gwede Mantashe, the Secretary-General of the ANC, described it as not only disrespectful, but also an example of stereotyping and racism, illustrating how racism had not been eradicated within the past 18 years: "These people (whites) don't have any forgiveness. They still hate us like they hated us before" (Molatlhwa 2012: 4). David Makhura, the ANC Secretary-General in Gauteng, was one of a handful who did not consider it related to racism (Lamprecht 2012a: 2). Mantashe denoted it as a form of hate speech. He perceived it to be on the same level as the song *dubula iBhunu* ("kill the [white] farmer"). Black critics ignored the fact that Murray is a so-called "satirical resistance artist" who was critical of the former regime and contributed to the design of posters for the struggle against apartheid, Cosatu and the End Conscription Campaign (Pople 2012: 10).

It should be noted that a similar "shocking" painting (*Ngcono ihlwempu kunesibhanxa sesityebi*: Better poor than a rich puppet) by a black artist, Ayanda

Mbulu, did not illicit any criticism. It depicts a group of South African leaders alongside American presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush. "In this work, Jacob Zuma is depicted with his exposed penis supported by a crutch, apparently to symbolize the frequency of Zuma's sexual behavior" (Mabandu 2012: 5).

Regarding the above-mentioned song, EFF leader Julius Malema performed the song, which originated during the struggle against apartheid, on several occasions. The isiZulu phrase "dubulu ibhunu" in the song means "kill/shoot the farmer/ white man". Initially he ignored a Gauteng High Court interdict which banned the song as unconstitutional and against the law. During a visit to Zimbabwe in 2010, Malema went on to say that South African mines must be nationalised as "whites had done enough exploiting of minerals. It is now the turn of the black majority to do the same" (Gama 2010: 4). Malema's visit to Zimbabwe intended to demonstrate support for the government of President Robert Mugabe, as well as obtain information on the manner in which the white farmers have been dispossessed of their farms. As the leader of the EFF, he repeated that mines and land must be "taken back" from those (whites) who "stole" them from the masses (Tempelhoff 2013: 4). In November 2011 he was suspended from his post as president of the ANCYL. He was found guilty by the disciplinary committee of ANC of seeking to sow division by criticising President Jacob Zuma and bringing the party into disrepute by calling for regime change in neighbouring Botswana. The leadership of the ANCYL was dissolved in March 2013, with Mantashe citing their ongoing lack of discipline and hostility towards the ANC as reasons for this step (Lamprecht 2013: 6).

In another event, the leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA) Helen Zille, mentioned on Twitter that children from the Eastern Cape fled like "refugees" to the Western Cape due to the collapse of the school system in that province. Children were also sent home because of a shortage of teachers (Spoormaker 2012: 6). She was labelled a racist and even called "a racist bitch who deserves to die and burn in hell", because she described the children as refugees (Eybers 2012: 16). Patrick McKenzie, ANC MP, asked Zille "why does she hate black people so much?" when she criticised ANC women of the National Assembly for not doing enough to earn their salaries; thereby implying the lack of correlation between the women's high salaries and their productivity (Gerber 2012: 2).

Another example where position and race came to the fore was when Lulu Xingwana, the Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, shouted at a white air hostess: "Shut up. Is it because I am a Ka….?" (Du Plessis & Rossouw 2012: 1). This occurred on a flight when she requested to be upgraded to business class and was informed that there were no seats available on the fully booked flight. Apart from this example, the media reported on several instances recently

in which the "K-word" featured in heated communication between members of the two races (Van Wyk 2012: 1; Van der Walt 2012: 3).

In the final example, the ANC invited some 70 representatives of Afrikaner organisations for a "meaningful dialogue" on the alienation of Afrikaners from the ANC, but only 19 accepted. The rest expressed their doubt and refused to attend. Dirk Hermann, the General Secretary of the labour union Solidarity, phrased it as follows: "They can't communicate on one day while they destroyed the Afrikaner's cultural heritage and discriminate against them with unfair so-called affirmative action" (Lamprecht 2012b: 1; this author's translation).

General context

The above-mentioned instances should be viewed against the backdrop of the broader socio-political context in South Africa, as not all the specific episodes can be mentioned in detail.

Flip Buys, the Head of Solidarity and Chair of Afriforum, stated that between 2000 and 3000 farmers have been murdered since 1994 (Van Rooyen 2010: 2). *Mail & Guardian* (2010: 36), however, reported that the number of murdered farmers exceeds 3000. For example, in April 2010 Eugene Terre'Blanche, the former leader of the rightwing Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB), was allegedly murdered by two of his workers. This murder took place in a province where racial tension is on the increase. According to Juanita Terblanche, (not related to Eugene Terre'Blanche), a DA MP in the North West Province, "this (murder) happened in a province where racial tension in the rural farming community is increasingly being fuelled by irresponsible racist utterances by the ANCYL and the North West Cosatu secretary, Mr Solly Pheto" (Anon. 2010a: 1).

A climate of "non-communication" and the use of violence is evident in South Africa and is supported by the findings of research conducted by the Medical Research Council in 2008. Their Youth Risk Report indicates that teenagers consider violence as the only method of conflict resolution, and not constructive participation, as 15% are armed with some kind of weapon; 36% reported enduring bullying in the past months; 21% had been involved in some form of physical fighting in the six months prior to the research; 19% belonged to gangs; 27% felt unsafe in the preceding month; and 21% attempted suicide (n=10270 teenagers between 14-17 years) (Mbewu 2010: 11). These findings relate to the low position of South Africa on the 2012 Global Peace Index (GPI), whereby South Africa fell from 98 in 2007 to 127 in 2012, in which respect for other people's rights is one of the important indicators (GPI 2012).

The high unemployment rate (35% of the youth aged between 15-34 and 15% of people between the ages of 35-64) (Joubert 2012a), the relatively poor economy,

the lack of service delivery at especially provincial and local level, and corruption, amongst other aspects, also create a breeding ground for ethnic and racial tension in an attempt to find a culprit for the situation.

It should also be borne in mind that the ruling ANC is a party supported by mostly blacks and, apart from COPE, the other two main opposition parties (the Democratic Alliance and the Freedom Front Plus) are supported mainly by whites. The DA claims to be multiracial, but the majority of its members remain whites and Coloureds. Any criticism these opposition parties articulate is often labelled as racist. The fact that the majority of the supporters of the main political parties belong to a large extent to a particular race could be considered a stumbling block to interracial communication, as it fosters the perception that different races are generally in opposition to each other.

Application and analytical reflection

Although the analytical tools of Jensen's model can be distinguished from each other, they are closely related and not mutually exclusive. Thus, there will be some overlap in the application, reasoning and interpretation of the above-mentioned occurrences.

Position of experiences

This concept mainly focuses on the social position of the individual/group, as well as the subjective understanding/interpretation of the world/occurrences on the basis of past and more recent experiences.

The strong reaction from the ANC and many blacks to The Spear, labelling it as an explicit form of racism, in contrast to the lack of reaction to Mbulu's painting (similarly featuring exposed genitals and denoting the same "message") reflects how criticism voiced from the "out-group position" (white) is taken very negatively as opposed to an individual from the "in-group position" (black). It further indicates the tendency to generalise and stereotype a negative response from a person of another race. The fact that a white man also vandalised the painting to express his disapproval thereof did not nearly elicit the same publicity. This illustrates the cultural sensitivity for comments or criticism from a race or cultural position not your own.

The verbal and non-verbal communication of the ANCYL leaders, for example, indicate that they consider their position as youth leaders of the majority ruling party as very important. Their communication articulates a position of power and illustrates its influence on the communication situation. It implicitly propagates the following principle: We (blacks) must do unto them what they (whites) had done unto us. Another incident, which demonstrates this "actor's social position" (Jensen 2008: 4), is reflected in Malema's interaction with a white journalist, Jonah

Fisher, in Luthuli House. During this interview he called the journalist a "bastard" and a "bloody agent" (Masombuka 2010: 4). Fisher was amused by Malema's response and laughed, upon which Malema said to him: "This is a revolutionary house and you don't come here with that white tendency, not here. You can do it somewhere else, *not here*" (Mahlangu 2010: 1; Majova 2010: 4). The physical position (own home: in Luthuli House and in Zimbabwe amongst his followers) is also evident in his belief that in his domain or within the "in-group's" territory disrespect is permissible and one may say anything one desires. On another level, the communication behaviour of Minister Lulu Xingwana, which brings the racial differences between her and the air hostess to the fore, illustrates that she perceives her "political position" so highly that exceptions should be made.

Certain members of the white population, and especially many Afrikaans-speaking farming communities, perceive their social position as a neglected minority group exposed to murder (personal letters in newspapers; cf. Van Rooyen 2010; Keogh 2011; Louw-Carstens 2012). The policies of black empowerment and affirmative action, as well as the initial rumours of nationalisation and the reality of dispossession of land from white farmers, heighten this experience of a position of powerlessness and marginalisation (Lamprecht 2012b). White youth in general perceive affirmative action as discriminatory, since they neither supported nor participated in apartheid (Lamprecht 2012c).

As opposed to the above, black South Africans' widespread dissatisfaction, especially with their economic position, is articulated by commentator and black consciousness proponent Andile Mngxitama (2010:13) as follows:

> The truth is most blacks experience increased poverty, bad education and healthcare. On the other hand white racism in its multiple forms is rampant. Economic racial inequalities lead to racism in the everyday interaction between blacks and whites. Basically, life for blacks remains an experience of humiliation. This is not the fault of white people, it's a result of the failure of the ANC to end racism through transforming the economy to serve the majority instead of BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) for a few. Whites practice racism because they can. We blacks remain a powerless majority... The terrible Terre'Blanche is dead, but racism and white supremacy are alive.

It is in a certain sense ironic that members of both races have the perception that their current position in South Africa is one of "powerlessness" and one that is unacceptable.

Cultural presuppositions and cultural self-perception
These two related concepts focus on the perceptions and affective components that the two races have of their own race (in-group), as one side of the coin, as well

as their perceptions of and affection for each other (out-group) on the other side (see description under theoretical perspective).

During Malema's interview with Jonah Fisher, Malema confirmed his perception of superiority, and racial undertones were clearly evident. His behaviour implies that the majority or ruling party may act as it pleases, irrespective of the consequences or the rights of other groups or minorities. Although Malema has been replaced by Lamola, the rhetoric and war talk remains the same; the content has only been somewhat revised (Anon. 2012: 16; Lamprecht 2012c). Given their influence in the ANCYL and EFF (a new political party), this may be setting the example for black and white youth to use a confrontational (racist?) style which is not conducive to equal participation, let alone interracial convergence.

The incident with Minister Xingwana illustrates that the past, with its abusive labels and racism, is to a certain extent still alive. Her reaction denotes the denial of the request by the white air hostess as racial discrimination. In her mind racism and discrimination are evident and defines her as "distinct from the other race" (Jensen 2008: 7) - in this case, the white air hostess.

Regarding the murder of farmers, and especially the murder of Eugene Terre'Blanche, many blacks stereotype whites who condemn the brutal murder of Terre'Blanche as racists, just like him, even if the whites voiced their total disapproval of the AWB and their past behaviour. In the township Tsing, near Terre'Blanche's hometown Ventersdorp, some black people celebrated his death with these words: "I'm glad he's dead" and "The dog is dead" (Anon. 2010b: 1).

The perception of hatred and racism was further heightened by a SMS circulated in the Limpopo Province prior to Freedom Day in April 2010. The message spread was that whites would be killed by blacks on this day. The then National Head of Police, General Bheki Cele, ordered the police to be in a state of alert (De Bruin 2010: 1), but nothing of the sort transpired on Freedom Day. The mere existence of the message heightened the perception that blacks are out to kill whites. The tendency of the general citizen to generalise, especially when it involves another culture and race, could stigmatise blacks as possible murder suspects in the minds of a great number of whites and could result in them avoiding any form of communication as far as possible.

The discussed examples or occurrences and the response from citizens to the mentioned issues indicate a rather strong disagreement between many black and white South Africans. This behaviour and the inherent verbal abuse, especially the labelling of individuals or groups, tend to evoke intense emotion, polarise even moderate citizens, and inhibit or even prevent constructive interracial communication.

These examples indicate that each group would rather identify with their own race who have adopted a general negative perception of the other race and tend to stereotype them.

Cultural fix points

Cultural fix points are the crucial points or issues in communication where the participants represent a clear opinion and point of view. It requires that the relevant individuals or groups identify with a specific topic and also take a position on the issue within the discussion, either positively or negatively. Within this concept one would be able to identify certain patterns in the conflict that are salient during a given period.

Nearly all occurrences discussed above represent topics that provoke emotional statements of strong agreement or disagreement. For example, the utterances of many youth leaders and their aggressive communication, the murder of farmers, economic inequalities, The Spear painting, affirmative action, etc. are without doubt highly emotional topics and provoke even more emotional statements. Many white and even black South Africans perceive Malema's song as totally unacceptable and even moderate whites perceive this song as a direct cause of the widespread murders and interpret it as a declaration of war. On the other hand, Zwelinzima Vavi, the Secretary-General of Cosatu, and Cosatu supporters say that this struggle song should not be taken literally, but as a figure of speech (Steenkamp 2010: 2).

Many white South Africans believe President Jacob Zuma identifies with this song, due to his failure to distance himself and the government from the song. Although Malema has been expelled from the ANC, it was largely due to his criticism of the party's policy towards the government of Botswana and his criticism of Zuma, and not the repeated performance of the song; a song which Judge Leon Halgryn declared a form of hate speech and the accompanying droning of supporters an instigation to commit murder (Keogh 2011: 1). This illustrates the cultural value that criticism of someone's political head and his party is reason enough to be expelled from the party and to dissolve its leadership, but that the promotion of hate towards another race is not reason enough. Thus, the "interaction" which members of the ANCYL and their followers proposed is not constructive debate, persuasion or communication but violence and even murder, if necessary, which is not conducive to interracial communication. This tendency to violence and a climate of "non-communication" is supported by the findings of research conducted by the Medical Research Council in 2008. The writer of the comment and analysis column in *Mail & Guardian* states:

> It is depressing, but perhaps unsurprising, that this is the place we have circled back to: a standoff between those who, like Julius Malema, think that chanting

> 'Kill the Boer' mobilizes a proud history in support of a current, legitimate political project, and those – particularly Afrikaners – who feel it violates their human rights" (*Mail & Guardian* 2010: 36).

Strong cultural and racial differences regarding beliefs and values emerge when so-called emotional topics are debated and it would seem that many black and white South Africans continue to identify strongly with their specific race and perceive themselves as distinct from other races.

CONCLUSION
Synthesis and general suggestions

The above-mentioned examples lead to the inductive proposition that the possibility for unbiased interracial communication, let alone possible convergence, is bleak. A general unwillingness to participate constructively on common issues that concern all citizens is evident in the mentioned newspaper articles. The South African context is complicated and conclusions can only be tentative due to the highly dynamic and even volatile political situation in the country (the recent power struggle both within the ANC and between the DA and the ANC in the Tlokwe Municipality is only one example). The high crime rate; the high unemployment rate; corruption; the social dynamics due to poverty; the minimum wage for unskilled workers; the existing inequality on many levels; the lack of service delivery and non-implementation of policy/decisions; and ambiguous claims from political leaders on important issues exacerbate an already complex multi-cultural and multi-racial situation (cf. Joubert 2012b: 2).

One of the stumbling blocks seems to be that the experiences of the past remain in the minds of people. Danny Titus of the ATKV (Afrikaans Language and Culture Society) shares this opinion and highlights the lack of adequate communication between South Africans, with most of them still having the walls of apartheid in their minds. It continues to be the manner in which many see and communicate with each other (Jackson 2010: 8).

A further stumbling block is the tendency to oversimplify a complex situation into broad generalisations and stereotypes: blacks are doing this and whites are like that (cf. Groenewald 1996: 13-15). The fact that one, incidentally white, artist critically comments on a specific black leader is interpreted and generalised as "whites hate blacks". The fact that both a black and white person vandalised the painting to indicate their disapproval was downplayed, while the art of a black artist who portrayed the same message was ignored by the protesters of the Murray painting.

This illustrates the selective perceptions of those who only take note of the instances that confirm their stereotypes, while overlooking and ignoring the instances that refute them. The unfortunate reality of the self-fulfilling prophecy comes into play when, for example, the labelling of whites as racist may contribute to the manifestation of this unwanted trait in that they will continue or adopt this behaviour if always labelled as such (Neuliep 2006: 195; Marger 2005: 77). The media could contribute by reporting on occurrences where the two races overcome their differences, such as the interracial prayer meeting for a better future in Delmas (Jackson 2012: 1). They could also make strategic decisions to not report or at least downplay occurrences where participants of the different races represent strongly different viewpoints, to use Jensen's terms, but which are in no way related to race as such, even if the participants play the proverbial race card in the hope to score opportunistic points. If reporters constantly emphasise racial differences when sensitive issues are discussed, it will bolster racism according to the agenda-setting role of the media.

The power of labels plays an important part, as it communicates at many levels of meaning during the communication process (Lull 1995: 71). Labels establish or challenge a certain kind of relationship between individuals or groups, denoting and increasing either distance or closeness. Orbe and Harris (2008: 50) claim it is often the case that persons or groups with political, economic and social power "occupy positions that allow them to label less powerful groups of people". The strategic use of labels increases and maintains the power base of those already in the most powerful positions, as is true of most of the above-mentioned examples.

Although official and/or institutional and informal interracial communication does take place within different contexts, it is often mere rhetoric. It could be assumed that there are a great number of instances of meaningful interracial communication, also on an interpersonal level, which are not reported in the media. Yet, even the few examples mentioned above are indicators of racial tension and a lack of meaningful intercultural communication.

There is no quick fix or easy answers, if any, to this complex issue. On the contrary, the greater the knowledge of the problem, the more racism seems like a possibly insurmountable stumbling block – especially when there is a great "distance" in the social position of the communicators, negative presuppositions exist, and highly emotional topics are on the agenda.

Despite the different perceptions, different positions and strong disagreement on certain issues, communicators should search, articulate and emphasise commonalities and similarities, as there are quite a number (Schutte 2009: 4-11). That would hopefully draw people closer together. Striving towards similarities,

rather than differences, is indicative of the idea that a model of cultural synergy or convergence should be pursued.

Real and perceived differences do exist. Unfortunately, in politics and where sensitive issues or differences about "cultural fixed points" are concerned, to use Jensen's terminology, perceptions are in most instances more important than the factual reality (Martin & Nakayama 2011: 82-85). This is a huge obstacle for communication between the different races. This harsh reality is confirmed by Frans Cronjé, of the South African Institute of Race Relations, who stated at a public forum on February 16 2010 that the different races in South Africa tend to stick to perceptions of their experiences of reality which do not always correspond with the factual situation.

On the other hand, South Africans should acknowledge their racial prejudices and not fear open discussion (Joubert 2012c: 4). It cannot be addressed if its existence and the extent thereof are denied. It is impossible to avoid all "emotional topics", especially in a country like South Africa. The races should address the issues and be accommodating in their verbal and non-verbal communication, while debating these topics: whether they stereotype, generalise and recall the past or avoid them by rather communicating with empathy (Asante, Miike & Yin 2008: 215-230). This would be the beginning of an improved climate for interracial communication.

Communicators should downplay their position of power, whether it is race, gender, political affiliation, social status, economic wealth, etc. and perceive each other as unique individuals all deserving of respect (cf. Boon 1996). Although it is necessary to consider the bigger picture and co-cultures, it should also be remembered that not every person is necessarily typical of the stereotyped perceptions of a certain race.

Thus, the following proposition can be made: The road to the "recovery" of meaningful interracial communication may be possible if all citizens of different races, whether individuals or in groups, whether privately or officially, whether orally or in written form, and especially reporters/editors and people considered to be leaders should take the following into consideration during their communication:

- ♦ People in a "privileged position", whether real or perceived, should not misuse the associated power of their position (political, social, economic, gender, racial or member of the majority/minority), but rather interact as equals in a dialogical manner.

- ♦ All races should take a relativistic stance on their culture or race. While the different origins of people and own biases should be acknowledged, stereotyping should be eradicated and topics which will provoke emotional

reactions should be handled in a culturally sensitive way, even if there is disagreement.

♦ The context of criticism or differences of opinion, which is inherently part of a democracy and freedom of speech, should be taken into consideration. The content of the communication should be scrutinised if race is really a salient issue in the message, for example, do objective facts change if it is communicated by another race or someone from the "out-group"?

♦ All races, and especially young people, should address their racial perceptions and change their "war-like" demeanour during communication. The government should also realise that inequalities of any sort instigate racial tension and should be addressed in a culturally sensitive way.

♦ Racial hatred should not be a matter for the courts. Rather, all citizens, whether in civil society, in different political parties, in the media, of different races or ethnicities, must act and communicate in a responsible and culturally sensitive way to isolate the extremists of different racial groups, whether right or left. Instead of violence, the different groups should interact and feel comfortable to disagree freely with each other. Hopefully then the communicators who perceive race to be an important issue would give up their lonely cause of hatred.

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