

The construct of white Afrikaner carguards in Durban¹

Lydia Dekker

August 2010

1. Introduction

The danger of the single story

In a talk circulated on the *Technology, Entertainment and Design* (TED) conferences website, Chimamanda Adichie (2009) a Nigerian writer spoke of the danger of hearing a “single story” of a people and consequently forming warped views of the group. She contended that the media and literature can create a “single story” of a group of people to such an extent that it prevents the readers from hearing the other “stories” that make up who or what the affected group is. In other words, when the media portrays groups of people from a single perspective, it denies the listener or reader the complete story or stories as no group is homogenous but rich in diversity:

It is single stories which create stereotypes, but the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story (Adichie, 2009).

Her warning can be applied to the “stories” of the Afrikaner² ethnic group in South Africa. More specifically, my concern is that her caution can be applied particularly to a small segment, namely Afrikaner carguards who because of, as I will show, a one-story approach, often are classified or relegated to a lower class by both fellow Afrikaners and by society at large. A media headline in the

¹ I use the term carguard as a combined noun. I would like to acknowledge the Maurice Webb Trust who provided the funding for this paper, facilitated by the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity.

² The Afrikaner in this article and also in the forthcoming Masters thesis “The Identity Construction of the Afrikaner Carguard”, focuses on Afrikaans speaking white carguards in the city of Durban. I acknowledge that the Afrikaans-speaking population is not restricted only to the white population group in South Africa. However, in Durban the sample group was selected from white Afrikaners residing in the designated research area. Initially for sampling purposes, I selected and classified the participants as Afrikaners; however, during the fieldwork process this classification was confirmed by the participants themselves as their preferred identity.

Mail and Guardian which discussed the plight of poor white Afrikaners in the Bethlehem settlement area (Williams, 2008) highlighted this tendency that the majority of South Africans often only hear a single story about the Afrikaners in general. The headline read: “Zuma: I did not know that there were poor whites”. The perception that ‘there are no poor white people’ was expressed by the public during my fieldwork and on public internet forums (Dalmage, 2009; Bernard, 2009). Some respondents said that “whites were and still are financially privileged”; “I am always surprised when I see white caregivers. It does not seem normal”; “it is unacceptable, because white people are perceived as rich people”; “We blacks do not think that white people can be that poor”. From these responses I only heard a single story; a story that said, “White people are all privileged”, “poor whites are an abnormal phenomenon”, and that “it is unacceptable to be poor and white”.

My broader research objectives for the purpose of my Masters degree are to take the Afrikaner caregivers' narratives and demonstrate that this marginalised group's “story” is multiple and diverse and that there is no “one story”. Thus we gain insight into the diversity of who and what the caregiver is. This dovetails with the focus of this particular paper which is on research methodology and in a broader perspective the detail of my role as participant observer which allowed me to gather particularly rich insights into this particular segment of society.

2. Research problem

Before a discussion of my research methodology ensues, it is necessary to briefly state the research problem. After the 1994 democratic elections everyone had to face change. For the majority of South Africans this change was viewed as positive. This research aimed to investigate the extent to which certain groups have adapted to the new dispensation. Adaptation to the new South Africa required more than just a change of attitude, as the formation of personal, ethnic and national identities start in the home within a social

context. It is reasonable and understandable that certain adult South Africans who were raised in the apartheid context would find it extremely difficult to redefine the 'self' in the context of this rapidly changing environment in a very short time frame. My research intended looking at a segment of Afrikaners who can be labelled as 'poor' due to their current socioeconomic position. Thus my research concerns identity construction of Afrikaner caregivers in South Africa. Freedman and Freedman (1975: 125) argue that we are socialised into our identities from the cradle to the grave, meaning that the construction of our 'self' does not end in childhood, but continues to be shaped throughout life. The socialisation process of Afrikaners has many dimensions, as the apartheid governmental re-engineering processes played a huge role in the original shaping of these processes. The apartheid governmental structures socialised Afrikaners to be proud of their 'own' by using symbols. These symbols were presented to Afrikaners from a very young age and were incorporated into the formal school curriculum and less formally through religion and the media. These symbols included historical 'Afrikaner heroes' for example Piet Retief, Wolraad Woltemade and Racheltjie de Beer, to name a few. I ensured that the methodology employed allowed me to understand these construction processes. My study necessitated drawing on discursive analysis and an interpretive approach.

3. Research Orientations

a. Discursive Analysis

This research methodology was drawn from two research paradigms: the constructionist paradigm and the interpretive paradigm. The constructionist paradigm allowed me to look at the construction of the participants' social reality. This paradigm focuses on discourse and discourse analysis.

Discourses such as language, culture and policies inform social identity and were important points of departure of this investigation. Burr (1995: 48) explains discourse as being: "A set of meanings, metaphors, representations,

images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events”.

The broader research focused on how the participants constructed themselves through narratives, which indicated how they construct the ‘self’ through images, metaphors and so forth. Burr (1995: 49) further explains that each discourse, such as language, culture and politics, focuses on a different aspect of the same phenomenon and by using different discourses the same phenomenon can be viewed from different perspectives. This means looking at the participants' social identity construction informed by ‘race’, gender, and the historical discourse of apartheid in particular since these caregivers grew up during the apartheid era.

Discourses are interlinked and overlapping. It behoved me to study the Afrikaner identity through the discourse of ‘race’ as well as to examine how apartheid shaped the participants' understanding of ‘race’. It was also not possible to separate ‘race’ and gender in many instances. Both masculinities and femininities were shaped in a particular way during apartheid within the Afrikaans culture and this too is encapsulated in the notions of race. It therefore was imperative for me to use the discursive framework to understand the participants' constructed identities and the social-economic contexts wherein they were born and raised, as well as their current social context (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999: 156). However, discourse analysis being methodological, needs to be further explained. A discourse analysis is concerned with determining the processes which come into play when people interact with each other (Burr, 1995: 178). It was by observing the interactive processes between the Afrikaner caregivers, and caregivers from different race groups and their clients that I came to be privy to much richer data which I would otherwise not easily have noticed. Yet these interactions are such a vital part of the research process and it was here, in the field as the participant observer, that I came to learn so much about my participants' identities that I would not have learned from the interview process alone. These processes

include how they talk and negotiate with each other; how they justify their actions and so forth (Burr, 1995: 178).

b. Taking an interpretative approach

The interpretative paradigm allows for the collection and interpretation of qualitative subjectivity (Wills, 2007: 160). Edmund Husserl and Wilhelm Dilthey, both advocates for qualitative studies, argued that interpretative/ constructionist research relies on the participants' viewpoints to understand their own social reality (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

The epistemology of the interpretative paradigm's focus is the ability of the researcher to listen to the participant (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999: 123). By listening to a participant the researcher should be able to study not only the participant's answers to the questions put to them, but also their overt reactions and covert body language while they are answering a question or relating an incident to the researcher (Terre Blanche & Kelly 1999: 123). A good example of this is Antjie Krog's reporting (1998) (cited in Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999) on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa following the 1994 democratic elections. The participants in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission used more than just language to convey their experiences during the apartheid era, but also expressed themselves by using emotions, body language and narratives. The full range of expressions were interpreted holistically by Antjie Krog, a South African poet, academic, writer and reporter. This interpretation included the emotional impact apartheid had on the individual and the social group to which the individual belonged. Examples of the importance of taking body language into account during research were also seen during my research on Afrikaner caregivers. Especially in the beginning phase of my research I was not totally trusted by the participants and at first they were reluctant to express their feelings regarding racial issues in fear that it would be used against them in some form or another. This reluctance and discomfort in sharing these views were

observable through body language; when the participants would refuse to make eye contact; would increase body distance; fold their arms; turn their shoulders away from me; or even change the subject. Body language also tended to highlight the participants' deeper emotions, especially when they felt extremely vulnerable or felt very strongly about a certain topic. A good example of this was when a participant told me that when her father received a full military funeral post-1994 she and her siblings ripped the new South African flag from their father's coffin and replaced it with the old one, since they felt no bond with the new South African symbols.

As with the constructionist paradigm, interpretative researchers are urged to look at the context wherein the participants' experiences developed such as the socio-historic and linguistic contexts (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999: 124). In other words, understanding is situational and could be better described by the German word *Verstehen*, employed by Marx Weber (Wills, 2007: 293).

Verstehen is to understand the perspective of other people, and because understanding is situational it is important to scrutinise not only the participants' current, but also their historic situations (Wills, 2007: 293). To understand the Afrikaner canguard, it is important to research them within the context of apartheid, because without understanding their identity construction during apartheid, it would be impossible to understand their identity construction post-apartheid.

Furthermore, deploying the interpretative paradigm's methodology allowed not only for interpretation, but also for ethnographical or participant observation research methods, social and historical construction (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

c. Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry is an important tool in the interpretative paradigm as it highlights not only the experience but also the context of the experience. Thus narrative inquiry is very important in the study of ethnicity (Blaser, 2007: 60).

Narratives of Afrikaners assisted me in understanding how they are negotiating 'whiteness' in post-apartheid South Africa (Blaser, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (cited in Blaser, 2007: 61) named two pairs of directions of a narrative: inward and outward, forward and backward. They explain these directions as: "Inward" which looks at feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions; "Outwards" which looks at the environment and external conditions wherein the narrative was constructed, "in other words the historical, political and socioeconomic conditions"; "Backwards" and "forwards" refer to the temporal facet, in other words it looks at the past, present and future (Blaser, 2007: 61). To understand this specific Afrikaner segment, we need to look at all these dimensions and how they construct themselves narratively.

Rakin-Brown (cited in Wills, 2007: 296) describes the importance of narrative research as revealing not only the events described by the participant, but also the feelings and the reflexivity involved in the recounting of the particular event. Thus it is important to note that narratives are not just stories being told but, according to Bruner (2004: 692), it is a cognitive process.

A cognitive person is seen as someone who is constructing meaningful relationships by absorbing information, thinking about it and then putting it out by narrating it (Bamberg, 2005: 215). Narrative also serves the purpose of helping the narrator to work through challenging circumstances through the cognitive processes available to her (Bamberg, 2005: 25). These cognitive processes were visible when the participants started describing a specific event in their lives from a certain perspective. Often, after relating the incident to me from this perspective, the perspective seemed to shift from its original position. This shift in perception often can be perceived when the participants were contradicting themselves. This can often be seen and recognised when asking a participant a question, and they often respond very quickly. However, the participants sometimes would return to the question and later respond with a different answer to the same question. These different answers often were an

indication that the participants had thought upon or reflected on the question and on our conversation. An example of this shift in perception could be seen in the reason one of the participants gave for resigning from his job at the railways. At first Sarel³, an ex-railways employee, contended that he resigned because he did not want to share the ablution facilities with his 'black' co-workers. However, at a later stage he acknowledged that the actual reason for his resignation was because of fear; he was afraid of what his future would hold. Initially he gave the impression he resigned because he was racist but after probing it was revealed that he did not want to be a pawn of the government. By this he demonstrated the capacity for agency. Many other participants argued that they were jobless because of the new government, but later on, after reflecting upon this, some acknowledged that their lack of education played a significant role in determining their current socioeconomic position. This shift in perspective revealed the agency that determined the participants' shift in ethnic identity. It was interesting to see how the narrational reflection on their past, current and future expectations I referred to above, tended to reconstruct their identity. Bamberg (2005: 223) says that "narratives, irrespective of whether they deal with one's life or an episode or event in the life of someone else, always *reveal* the speaker's identity". In other words, narrating the self is about constructing your social and personal identities through reflection as you 'tell your story'.

Narratives have an important place in qualitative research as they not only place an individual in context; they also locate an individual's constructed identity within stories. According to Fay (1996: 197) stories are lived because "human activity is narrational in character and form". He further argues that by telling stories we "knit the past and future together" (Fay, 1996, p. 197). By using narrative research I was not only able to locate the caregivers' identity within the larger social context, but also able to see how their past life, current life and future expectations are interlinked.

³ Real names withheld to protect identities.

4. Sample

As I used the interpretive research paradigm, I selected my sample group by using convenience or opportunistic sampling, as I had to rely on participants on the basis of their availability (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1990: 380).

Qualitative researchers seldom have a large sample as the focus of a qualitative researcher is the relevance of the research topic rather than the representative sample, which quantitative researchers use (Neuman, 2000: 196). I interviewed seventeen participants on four different sites, two of the sites were at shopping centres, one site was in a hospital car park, and the other site was on the beachfront in the inner city.⁴

There were three criteria for selecting the participants in this study. The first criterion was age as I was interested in the perceptions of Afrikaners pre- and post-apartheid. I targeted Afrikaners who were currently forty years old and older, as they would have been part of the population group that would have been economic entities during the apartheid dispensation. These participants having grown up during the apartheid era would have had their social identity largely informed within this context. The majority of the participants resided for the most part of their adult lives in Durban, although generally they grew up in the Transvaal. The second criterion was that their mother language had to be Afrikaans, and finally that they had to have worked as a carguard.

My participants' working experience ranged from two months to twelve years in this field of work. By interviewing this range I could acquire the perspectives of carguards who recently entered the field and not yet become settled and desensitised by the public opinion right up to the more seasoned carguards. Seasoned carguards often described their experiences as rewarding, as they felt that they were delivering a meaningful service to the public. Carguards who had been working on the same site for a longer period of time, in some cases up to twelve years, reported that they have 'regular customers' who are very

⁴ The exact location of sites will not be revealed to protect the identities of participants.

supportive and who would seek out parking places close to them. This had the advantage that these carguards not only got to know their 'customers' well, but they also knew which car belonged to whom, which enhanced the customer's security. The newer carguards, who had only been in the field for a few months, described their work as demeaning and difficult. They also were more sensitive toward the 'racial' remarks and 'racial' tensions which often come to the fore in this kind of work. One example which I personally witnessed was when a black motorist who obviously did not approve of being directed to a parking spot by a white carguard shouted, "This is not your country anymore, it belongs to us and you cannot tell me what to do".

5. Methods

a. Participant observation and loosely structured interviews

Participant observation is a time-consuming activity and as there were several different participants scattered across the sites - rather large parking lots - I had to plan the amount of time I was going to spend with each during the course of the day to allow for a balanced distribution. I was planning to approach my participants with triangular research methods: one loosely structured interview, several discursive interviews and then with myself in the role of participant observer, and finally a focus group. This triangulation allows a researcher to collect data from diverse sources and it can help the researcher to "hone" in on a correct understanding of a phenomenon by approaching it from several different angles (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999: 128).

To establish a connection with the participants I initially presented myself as an empathetic researcher. One participant told me at the beginning that he did not trust me, because I might tell the government about our conversations and he did not know who would read my material. However, several months after our initial conversation this participant continued to share very personal information with me as he ceased to feel threatened by me. As a participant

observer I planned to spend long hours with the participants and it was imperative for me to establish a certain level of trust and rapport with them.

Participant observation allows the researcher to conduct research from several angles: informal interviews, participation and direct observation which give access to the participants' life histories as she becomes more intimately familiar with them (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). I decided to conduct loosely structured, informal interviews in addition to a method which I would like to tag as 'conversational' or 'discursive'. I do distinguish between the two. I used the loosely structured, informal interview at the beginning of my field work, at which time I introduced myself and explained the research goals and objectives. In addition, I used this opportunity to gather some basic background information on the participants, keeping the interview loosely structured. Bray (2008: 309) argues that interviews complement participant observation because they allow the researcher to compare the interview with the actual observed behaviour in the field. Subsequent interviews with the same participants were in addition to gain new material to clarify points brought up during my participant observation.

I decided not to take notes during the interviews as this would interrupt the informal setting and inhibit the free flow of the conversation. In the majority of cases, I recorded the interviews allowing me to capture the content and emotional responses of the participants.⁵ The recorder was worn overtly, not only during the interviews but also whilst doing participant observation. From the recordings I could pick up how a participant often paused or hesitated before answering, indicating an initial uncertainty or reluctance to respond to the subject under discussion or give an indication of reflexivity. For instance, emotions could be detected when 'race' was discussed, and I realised how much information would be lost if the participant had refused my request for the interview to be recorded. Even when I asked the same questions to the

⁵ Although the recorder was used in most interviews, there were two participants who would not give permission to be recorded but would accept me taking notes. There were also two incidents where the recorder malfunctioned and I had to take notes and rely on my memory.

same participant, in the case when the recorder malfunctioned, while recording a subsequent interview, the initial unrecorded responses were lost and could not be recaptured.

6. Ethics

All academic research methodology books discuss the ethics of research and warn researchers to be aware of this and to abide by the normal set of ethical requirements, such as supplying informed consent forms to the participants; keeping their identity undisclosed; asking permission to record interviews, to mention only a few. This has become part and parcel of a researcher's conduct. However, there are always issues involved in research that is not as clear-cut as to what is ethically permitted or not.

A distinction is sometimes made between ethics and morals, and Robson (2002: 66) says that although both indicate differences between good and bad, or right or wrong, ethics as it is used in research in the social sciences usually refers to the conduct (interaction) of the researcher with the participants. However, it is possible to behave ethically, according to the rules of your organisation, but morally be out of order (Robson, 2002: 66).

During my research a participant, who had signed a consent form, shared very personal and very sensitive information with me. However, after careful consideration I decided that although I had a consent form signed by the participant that it would not be morally correct for me to use this information however relevant it may have been to my research analysis. Ethically I could have transcribed and included the information, however I was of the opinion that morally it would not be ethical to do so even if he had remain anonymous as I felt that it might later have a detrimental psychological impact upon him if he sometime in the future saw his 'secret' revealed in a publication. Babbie & Mouton (2003: 520) argue that, "The scientist has the right to the search for truth but not at the expense of the rights of other individuals in society". In other words, the researcher holds an important responsibility to the participant

and this responsibility should be very carefully guarded (Bray, 2008: 313). This is especially true since intimate experiences; sensitive historical or contemporary events often are articulated in a narrative format during the research process. Researchers warn that it is easy to become so 'native' during your fieldwork that you lose your objectivity and although my participants knew that I was there as a researcher, the public and the other caregivers who were not part of my sample group, did not know the purpose of my presence there. Babbie and Mouton (2003: 296) raise the question of ethics and whether being a covert researcher is deceptive and whether this deception is ethical. Covert research can be defined as research done on a participant without their informed consent (Patton, 2002: 272).

There are some advantages in researching covertly, as participants might behave differently towards the researcher if they know that they are being researched and observed, than they would have done in a natural setting (Patton, 2002: 269). But the covert researcher is generally condemned by sociology and psychology institutions because of research history where participants were exposed to physical and emotional harm or potential harm (Patton, 2002: 270). But covert research can be justified as per Patton's (2002: 272) example where the researcher downplays the research role to participants as not they who are being researched per se, but the programme which they are participating in.

Although my entry into my sample group was not covert, the public was not aware of my role as a researcher as my intention was not to research the public per se, but the interaction between the participants and the public and the participants' reactions to the interaction. There also are other forms of "deceit" where a researcher can covertly deceive a group by stating or suggesting that she believes in the group's values and beliefs (Patton, 2002: 272).

With my sample group, I decided to not to be deceitful regarding their values and norms, as it was necessary for me to gain their total trust to allow for a

transparent interviewing process. Being brought up as an Afrikaner myself I knew that if your fellow Afrikaners found out that there was any deception you will not only lose their trust, but also, due to the snowballing effect, the trust of others. In this case the carguards' interconnection with other carguard groups (a relatively small community) could mean that I would be refused any further access into the field.

7. Doing the research

a. Gaining Access

Gaining access to the field was not as challenging as I had initially thought it would be when I conceived of the project. Because the participants are carguards they are viewed as self-employed and because they are part of the informal job sector I had very few barriers to cross in gaining access to the field.

Although carguards are not paid a salary and only work for the tips they receive from the public, they nevertheless are part of an organized collective. Legally they are bound to be registered and qualified as security officers. To qualify they are required to attend a security course which they often cannot afford to do. The other problem is that they do not always understand the full legal ramifications of and intricacies involved in such registration. The other option is that one security officer registers legally and that the other carguards then legally 'work' for her. The security officer negotiates a site to work from, and the carguards each pay a site fee which in effect is a franchise fee to the registered security officer who is the 'owner' of the site, for the privilege to work on that site. Thus, although they are legally 'employed', they work as independent franchisees and as such do not receive a salary, but in reality are self-employed. The registered security officer only visits the site on average once a week and then only to collect the week's site fees from the site manager. The site manager usually is elected by the other carguards to collect the site fees and to liaise between them and the security officer. Although each

carguard works individually, I still felt that I should approach the site manager for permission before interviewing the carguards on 'her' site as a courtesy gesture and in so doing acknowledge her authority on the site.

b. Trying to blend in

Kevin Kelly and Martin Terre Blanche (1999: 128) point out the importance of the researcher not disturbing the context unnecessarily and that it is important to blend in with the setting. This I achieved by working alongside the participants as a carguard myself. In my initial approach to them I was careful to win their trust to achieve successful fieldwork. As a participant observer I planned spending long hours with the participants and thus needed to establish a certain level of trust and rapport with them. Prior to starting the field work I noted the carguards' clothing style and to blend in with them I purposefully 'dressed down' to be as unobtrusive as possible. I also acquired an orange vest similar to that worn by carguards with a specific site. These vests are part of the 'uniform' that identifies the carguard as an official occupant of his particular site. My orange vest accidentally got stained with black car oil on the second day of my fieldwork. One of the participants pointed this out to me and reprimanded me, saying that it is very important to arrive at work clean and tidy. Carguards generally do not have a good reputation and the participant explain to me that it is imperative for them to present a neat and clean front to prevent the public's opinion from becoming negative.

b. Finding appropriate times and context

I usually conducted subsequent interviews during their lunch breaks when we were able to sit in a nearby restaurant drinking coffee and eating a light snack. I soon changed this approach when I realised that the participants were more comfortable sitting at their usual places prior to my research. Here they were more open to dialogue. In the restaurant situation they tended to view the interview as formal and only answered my questions briefly and matter-of-factly, making it less discursive. Another reason the participants did not seem

comfortable in the restaurant setting is that they indicated that they very seldom frequented restaurants. They also felt that because I paid for the coffee and snack they were obliged to answer the questions very carefully so as not to waste my time or money.

Initially I tried to hold a formal focus group where I could invite several participants to sit down at a neutral venue where we could have an undisturbed group discussion, for example away from their workplace, a place where they would feel comfortable. This, however, created several problems, mainly because the participants work a six-day week and all have different days off and they were thus not all free at the same time. This also proved to be true during the day when they took their breaks at different times. However, during the course of their working day, at quiet times, a few of them would often group together for a quick chat and this gave me the opportunity to ask a few questions which would lead to a group discussion, while wearing the recorder unobtrusively. I did however manage to arrange a group discussion after a significant news event broke in the media.

The murder of Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) leader and hero, Eugene Terre'Blanche (2010), not only became a highly sensitive political matter that stirred emotions and threatened race relations over a wide spectrum, but especially enraged the far right wing (Van Wyk & Scholtz, 2010). After this incident the carguards at a particular site asked to meet with me. The national and international media portrayed the Afrikaners as being an endangered species and that the murder of this far right wing leader stirred fears that this was going to be the beginning of Afrikaner genocide and would eventually lead to civil war (Waldner, 2010). These media reports stirred up old emotions of fear and uncertainty amongst my participants to the extent that they wanted to talk to me as a group on this subject. One particular carguard did not want us to conduct the focus group on their worksite, as he mistrusted his co-workers and the public, which he would overhear us talking about politics and compromise future relations with them or instigate conflict. I had already

planned a get together to thank them and decided to combine the two in this single event. The request felt like a compliment to me: that they had formed a close enough bond to be able to talk to me about something so close to their heart. The focus group discussion became heated after a very drunk black man decided to join us at the table and refused to move after we explained to him that we were busy with a meeting. This led to a restrained confrontation on the part of the male participants before the management of the facility eventually removed the man. The man left under loud protest shouting profanities at the 'white people who think South Africa still belongs to them'.

8. Reflecting on myself and the interviews

a. Self reflexivity

Recordings allowed for my own reflexivity on the material I had gathered and assisted in my preparation for the next session. After each interview I spent some time summarising the interview or 'conversation' on the recorder adding my own thoughts on the matters discussed and also on the participants' reactions in general. Recording my own thoughts served as my field notes as well as preventing important aspects discussed from slipping my mind which would have happened had I waited for a suitable time later to write them down.

During the fieldwork phase I kept the recorder close to me at all times so that even when reflecting on interviews while I was busy with something else, I could pause for a moment and record my thoughts and continue with my task at hand without losing a particular train of thought because it was not a convenient time to stop what I was doing to write it down. My initial intention was to research carguards in their normal work setting, however I quickly realised the importance of observing not only the participants' behaviours but also personally experiencing the public's reactions when interacting with them as a carguard and in so doing was able to observe the dynamics of the interaction in which the carguards' identity came to the fore. Blumer (cited in Buechler, 2008) places a very strong emphasis on the interaction of the 'other'

and argues that social identity construction is only possible when 'others' assign meaning to you and your actions and vice-versa.

b. Trying to be impartial

As a participant observer I realised the importance of remaining impartial to remarks made by the participants when they clashed with my world-view. By remaining impartial and allowing the participants to express their own opinions without criticism from me, made the interviews participant-centred, rather than researcher-centred. Zoe Bray (2008: 314) says it is important to stay impartial, allowing the participant to be an expert on his own life, and to make him realise that his opinion does count, and that the research is there to give him a platform to express himself. Babbie & Mouton (2003: 297) also talk about the importance of temporarily adopting your participants' point of view, to gain "insider understanding". They also say that it might be hard to tolerate certain viewpoints the participants might express, but also said the researcher must guard against making the participants' viewpoint your own (Babbie & Mouton, 2003: 297).

Robert Bellah (1970) (cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2003: 298) uses a term of 'symbolic realism', which requires the researcher to treat the beliefs he is studying as worthy of respect without ridiculing them but without making them his own viewpoint. Thus, as a researcher, you have to guard against abandoning your objectivity in favour of adopting the viewpoint of your participants and in the process losing the ability to view and understand the phenomenon you are studying within your research framework (Babbie & Mouton, 2003: 298). Being impartial to remarks can sometimes be difficult as I often had to remind myself that I was there to observe this particular behaviour and not to interfere. The discussions often centred on the topic of 'us' versus 'them' and as some of the participants expressed their viewpoints very emotionally and explicitly I had to ensure that I remained impartial in the discussion, thus allowing them a platform to express their frustrations, fears

and in my view often misguided 'racial' perceptions, without trying to change their viewpoints through my knowledge base or convictions.

The public would often be rude to the participants or the participants might respond by throwing a racial remark behind the public's back when the interaction was cross-racial and I had to learn to restrain my reactions to this. Most of the time the public's behaviour was unjustified and racially motivated at the time, and as an outsider, (not sharing their socioeconomic reality) I had empathy with them and had to suppress a maternalistic urge to come to their defence because I felt that I had a greater ability to respond to these unjustified attacks, but had to keep on reminding myself of the purpose of my presence there. A personal example was when a man tried to solicit me, thus implying that if I can be a carguard I would be willing to be available for prostitution. This gave me an opportunity to observe this man's interaction with me as a carguard and the reaction of the male carguard who was with me at the time.

c. Focusing on interview dynamics

Conversational or discursive⁶ interviews were conducted on the site where the participants worked. The 'conversations' were very informal and were semi-directed by myself. By semi-directing these interviews I was able to manage the 'conversation' to ensure that the information was in line with the research objectives I had set and were not structured in the same way as the first interview. Our 'conversations' became give-and-take and as the research progressed we became very comfortable with one another to the extent that the participants more often than not dropped their guard and allowed me insight into their real feelings and thoughts involving the socioeconomic situation they currently found themselves in.

The questions I asked remained open-ended and allowed the participants to respond in their own time, and often they would respond only at our next

⁶ Discursive is defined as reflective, whereby participants are free to reason or argue their point of view (Billington, Hockey & Strawbridge, 1998: 16).

session, indicating reflexivity in that they spent time thinking about the questions before responding. According to Zoe Bray (2008: 310) open-ended questioning is a major technique in observational participation methodology. She continued by arguing that open-ended questions allow the participants to feel what they say is relevant and important to them at that given time, without predefining categories for them (Bray, 2008: 310).

My questioning techniques were very similar to Zoe Bray's suggestions: I acted on the information given to me by the participant and directed the comments into a direction which I wanted to further explore. Discursive and informal interviews were very well received.

9. Conclusion

Finally, to prevent us from hearing a 'single story', as suggested by Adichie we need use research methods which will open individual and group experiences for us without the biases which the media and our own socialisation processes position in front of us. To enable a researcher to understand her participants' experience from their point of view, it is necessary to use qualitative research methodology. Depending on what the focus of the researcher is and what type of data is required, the researcher needs to decide on the appropriate qualitative research methodology. Participant observation is not a methodology used by many researchers in sociology as it is not only very time consuming, but also requires certain skills from the researcher. As discussed above these skills include: observation skills without being involved; winning the trust of the participants to the extent that they will share personal experiences with you; the need to blend in with the setting, just to mention a few.

The advantages of participant observation were that this research of Afrikaner carguards was that they saw me as an equal, not only as a fellow-Afrikaner but as a fellow worker, making the data I collected much richer than it would have been if I had only used interviewing techniques. This made me feel part of the group and the friendly atmosphere encouraged me to be relaxed in this context,

which was very different than one I'm used to. The other advantage was that the caregivers continued to share with me, even though I had completed my fieldwork almost ten months prior to writing this paper. This continued flow of information not only enriched my research on a continual basis, but it also highlighted the need for further research in this field.

Bibliography

Adichie, C. (2009, October 14). *The Danger of the Single Story*. Retrieved April 10, 2010, from TED: <http://www.ted.com>.

Atkinson, P., & Hammersley, M. (1994). *Ethnography and Participant Observation*. Retrieved April 2, 2010, from Handbook of Qualitative Research: <http://hebra.haifa.ac.il/~soc/lecturers/sgooldin/files/6461181041799.pdf>.

Babbie, E., & Mouton, J. (2003). *The Practice of Social Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bamberg, M. (2005). Narrative Discourse and Identities. In T. K. J. Meister (Ed.), *Narratology Beyond Litterary Criticism, Mediality, Disciplinarity*. New York: Walter De Gruyter GmbH & Co.

Bernard, A. (2009, July 21). *Mail and Guardian*. Retrieved August 3, 2010, from Thought Leader: <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/bernardallen/2009/07/21/car-guard/>

Billington, R., Hockey, J. & Strawbridge, S. (1998). *Exploring Self and Society*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Blaser, T. (2009). *Afrikaner Identity After Nationalism: Young Afrikaners and the 'New' South Afrika*. Retrieved November 19, 2009, from <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/10539/6325/4/ThesisBody.pdf>.

Bray, Z. (2008). Ethnographic approaches. In D. Della-Porta, & M. Keating (Eds.), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London, New York: Routledge.

Dalmage, H. (2009, April 8). *Six months in Durban, South Africa*. Retrieved August 3, 2010, from Yikes! Only Three Months Left: <http://sixmonthsindurbansouthafrica.blogspot.com/2009/04/yikes-only-three-months-left.html>.

Freedman, A., & Freedman, P. (1975). *The Psychology of Political Control*. New York: St Martin's.

- Mackenzie, N., & Knipe, S. (2006). *Issues In Educational Research, Vol 16, 2006*. (Charles Sturt University) Retrieved April 10, 2010, from IIER: <http://www.iier.org.au/iier16/mackenzie.html>.
- Neuman. (2000). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Fourth ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. California: Sage Publishers.
- Robinson, V. (2004, July 8). *South Africa: Poor Whites are Strangers in a New Land - Norwegian Council for Africa*. Retrieved March 15, 2010, from Mail & Guardian online (South Africa): <http://www.africa.no/Detailed/5731.html>.
- Terre Blanche, M., & Durrheim, K. (1999). *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for the Social Sciences*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Terreblanche, S. (2005). *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652-2002*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Van Wyk, E., & Scholtz, H. (2010). Skokbewerings oor Terre'Blance, 11 April. *Rapport*, 1,4,5.
- Waldner, M. (2010). Steeds Wagtend op die (Swart) Panga-man, 2 May. *Rapport*, 4.
- Williams, D. (2008, July 24). *Zuma: I Did Not Know There Were Poor Whites*. Retrieved February 28, 2010, from Mail and Guardian online: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-07-24-zuma-i-did-not-know-there-were-poor-whites>.
- Wills, J. (2007). *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches*. California: Sage Publications.