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PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE RESISTANCE AGAINST APARTHEID AT THE FEDERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

ABSTRACT

The passive aggressive behaviour theory of de Angelis (2009) combined with the "hidden transcript" theory of Scott (1985, 1990) and the racial conflict theory of Himes (1971) provide a theoretical framework for understanding resistance to apartheid in South Africa as a protective mechanism. The specific focus of this paper is passive-aggressive resistance centred at the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (Fedsem). This was demonstrated in both overt and covert forms of behaviour in the educational approach developed at Fedsem, its worship life and spirituality and demonstrations.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper will investigate the phenomenon of resistance to apartheid in South Africa in a particular context of ecumenical theological education in a group of churches of European origin, as a passive-aggressive response within the increasingly violent context in which the struggle against apartheid was waged. The Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (Fedsem) became one of the most significant experiments in ecumenism in South Africa during the twentieth century. Fedsem came into being as one result of the Nationalist government's policy of apartheid exemplified in the passing of various pieces of legislation which led to the closure of a number of denominational colleges. It also became a focus of non-violent resistance during its thirty years existence (1963-1993) in the midst of apartheid. This resistance took many forms. Here we examine the passive-aggressive form of resistance as a particular form of response to apartheid in various aspects of the life of the Seminary.

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2. PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Passive-aggressive behaviour aims to overcome and penetrate the imposed restrictions of a current controlling hegemony. It is resistance which "takes the form of passive noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion and deception" (Scott 1985:312) or "emotional manipulation" (Cyuma 2012:32). Scott describes this as

> *any* act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are *intended* either to mitigate or deny claims made on that class by superordinate classes or to advance its own claims vis-à-vis those superordinate classes (Scott 1985:290 emphasis in original)

aiming at "survival and persistence" (Scott 1985:301) constituting acts of defiance based in frustration and a sense of official powerlessness which are characterized by indirect intervention. Cyuma suggests that

> A person unable to take action against the cause of the discontent might find an outlet in [passive] aggressive behaviour since it enables one to assert personal identity as distinct from the aspirations, beliefs and behaviour of a dominant opponent (Cyuma 2012:34).

Such behaviour can be viewed as a perfectly logical means of defence when reduced to long-term insignificance in a particular context. De Angelis (2009:4) describes it as a way "to get out of potentially conflict-filled situations" (De Angelis 2009:5) and as "a coping or defence mechanism in response to a dysfunctional environment" (De Angelis 2009:5) where it "… never ventures to contest the formal definitions of hierarchy and power" (Scott 1985:33). Rather it operates through "quiet resistance and 'counterappropriation'" (Scott 1985:34). Attacks are not overt, but hidden, and their significance is usually only noticed after some time. This delayed quality makes this kind of aggression difficult to identify, and more difficult to prevent: "The passive aggressive person is a master at covert abuse" (Mattenet 2009). This covert abuse is subtle, veiled or disguised by actions that appear to be normal, even reasonable, and as such it can be very confusing. Yet, it "is the vehicle by which negative feelings, resentment and anger appear in a little assertive, hidden and passive way" (Mattenet 2009). Also, it allows for the expression of negative feelings without having to take ownership of them, by obstructing other people's activities. It also allows perpetrators to feel satisfied with revenge feelings:

> Passive aggressive people have an axe to grind concerning past situations where their right to express anger was not allowed to surface. … Given that this hidden attack is a very much postponed

> revenge, passive aggressive people take genuine pleasure here and now in frustrating others (Mattenet 2009).

Scott (1985:277) emphasizes that: "[t]he kinds of resistance and the kinds of compliance we find … cannot be understood without reference to this larger context of real and anticipated coercion". He has expressed this in his concept of "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1990) which represent a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. These are "patterns of disguising *ideological* insubordination" (Scott 1990:xiii) through giving an unvoiced voice in situations of powerlessness through the appearance of conformity. It is constituted by

> … any argument which assumes that disguised ideological dissent or aggression operates as a safety valve to weaken 'real' resistance [. This] ignores the paramount fact that such ideological dissent is virtually always expressed in practices that aim at unobtrusive renegotiation of power relations (Scott 1985:190).

Scott has discerned the existence of "an important dialectic … between then hidden transcript and practical resistance" (Scott 1985:191).

Prior to Scott, Joseph Himes (1971:53-60) determined that five factors underpin his theory of racial conflict. These are the traditional racial structure, adequate motivation, power resources in the oppressed, organisational equipment and "appropriate tactics for the manipulation and delivery of power", eg. boycott (Himes 1971:54). This might well imply the use of passive-aggressive behaviour. For him,

> [h]eightened frustration is a crucial element of the motivational complex. The belief that change is possible, new social cohesion, and conflict ideology are other salient elements (Himes 1971:54).

We note that "there is a structural setting of frustration and aggression" (Himes 1971:54) within which "patterns of avoidance and quasi-impersonal cooperation were developed" eg. demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience (Himes 1971:58).[1] As a consequence, the rage neither exploded into violent conflict nor eroded the mechanisms and habits of

1 A demonstration is : "a cluster of tactical devices designed to tap and harness the power of public opinion and moral revulsion" (Himes 1971:58). "Non-violent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatise the issue that it can no longer be ignored" (King 1963:81). Acts of civil disobedience refer "to the calculated violation of laws. In such action the violators regard the law as unjust and/or immoral and act out their disagreement. Civil disobedience constitutes one method of mobilising

coexistence' (Himes 1971:54-55). Himes' theory is relevant to a study of resistance to apartheid in South Africa. The specific focus of this paper is passive-aggressive resistance centred at the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (FedSem).

3. THE FEDERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa was established on a site adjacent to the University of Fort Hare, at Alice in the eastern Cape, in 1963. It was the culmination of various attempts at ecumenical theological education which spanned the period from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries in South Africa (Denis & Duncan 2011: 9-55). But the foundation of Fedsem was the result of both external precipitating factors and internal ecclesiastical and political issues related to the mission and vision of the participating churches in the context of developments in the international ecumenical movement of the twentieth century. The Tambaram meeting of the International Missionary Council (IMC) held in Madras, India in 1938 had focused mainly on the relationship between "older" and "younger" churches (International Missionary Council 1938:7,170). As a direct result of Tambaram the Goodall and Nielsen Commission, sponsored by the IMC, studied theological education in the African continent and further stimulated discussion which culminated in the foundation of Fedsem. Fedsem came into being following the election in 1948 of the Nationalist Party in South Africa.

The segregation of theological education reflected the reality of segregation in the churches of European descent themselves, but Fedsem was a symbol also of the churches' resistance to apartheid (De Gruchy 1977:451-452).

The constituent churches of the four colleges in a federal structure were the Methodist Church of South Africa (John Wesley College), the United Congregational Church of South Africa (Adams United College), the Church of the Province of South Africa (St Peter's College) and the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church of South Africa; later these were joined by the Tsonga Presbyterian Church of South Africa and the Presbyterian Church of Africa (St Columba's College).

Francois Bill, former Principal of Albert Luthuli College, summarised the situation which led to the formation of Fedsem:

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the power of public opinion, moral revulsion and collective uncertainty" (Himes 1971:58).

> When the government took over the Adams property in 1957, the theological school moved to Modderpoort in the Orange Free State. ... During its existence at Modderpoort the Adams United Theological School, joint discussions with the Morija Theological School, jointly owned by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS, *Kereke ea Fora*) and the Swiss Mission in South Africa (SMSA, constituted as the Tsonga Presbyterian Church in 1960), with a view to forming one institution. This attempt failed largely because of border problems between Lesotho and the Republic. It was at that time that Rev William Booth (Principal, Adams United Theological Seminary) turned his attention to the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian groups to initiate discussion on the establishment of a joint theological institution in South Africa. These efforts culminated in the founding of the Federal Theological Seminary of South Africa. The school at Modderpoort was transferred to Alice and incorporated into the Adams College of which Mr. Booth became the first Principal ('Statement of Purpose and Historical Narrative'PC 80/1/1/2).

This was concurrent with the promulgation of the Fort Hare Transfer Act and the Extension of Universities Education Act (1959) which forced the Methodists, Presbyterians and the Congregational Union of South Africa to leave Fort Hare where they had trained their candidates for the ministry since 1921. "All of this drew the English-speaking churches together" (Duncan 2004:9). According to Joe Wing, President of Fedsem:

> ... three major factors led to the partial fulfilment of this vision in the establishment of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa. Those factors were:
>
> 1. The implementation of the Bantu Education Act and the Group Areas Act, which either deprived the Churches of their established centres for theological education or made it impossible for them to continue in institutions controlled by the Department of Bantu Education.
>
> 2. The urgent need to provide theological education at the highest possible level possible for black candidates for the ministry, who were prevented by law from enrolling in "white" universities, so called.
>
> 3. A growing desire on the part of the Churches to co-operate and pool resources in the formation and training of candidates for the ministry.
>
> At the time of the formation and for more than a decade thereafter the Seminary was perceived as (a) a symbol of positive resistance to the structures of apartheid; (b) an institution with a reputation for excellence in contemporary theological education; and (c) the most

> exciting and courageous ecumenical venture in Southern Africa at that time (Wing 1990:89-91).

So Fedsem's foundation can be attributed, in part, to political motives which restricted the churches' fields of operation in theological education: "Founded during the apartheid era, FEDSEM became a powerhouse of progressive theology and a renowned centre for ministerial formation" (Gundani, Masenya, Maluleke & Phiri 2002:69). Historically, unity within Fedsem was most pronounced when there were few or no other alternative courses of action available, eg. the passing of the Bantu Education Act which culminated in its opening, expropriation, the temporary stays at St. Bede's and Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre. It became a centre of ecumenical praxis in significant ways.

4. EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

It has to be remembered that the educational approach initiated, developed and adopted at Fedsem, ten years after the introduction of Bantu education, was a response to the needs of the participating churches and in the broader the political context where one

> rapid result of the Bantu Education Act of 1954 was the take-over of Lovedale [and similar institutions] and the destruction of the spirit which had prevailed there for over a hundred years (Wilson 1974:174).

The programme formulated and executed was dynamic. It was ever subject to rigorous evaluation and critique. And while it did not challenge Bantu education directly, it did in a passive-aggressive manner through "noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion and deception" (Scott 1985:312) or "emotional manipulation" (Cyuma 2012:32), "act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are *intended* either to mitigate or deny claims made on that class by superordinate classes or to advance its own claims vis-à-vis those superordinate classes" (Scott 1985:290) whose "intention … is nearly always survival and persistence" (Scott 1985:301). In order to provide an innovative alternative its purpose was to overcome and go beyond the imposed restrictions of the current controlling hegemony by facilitating the process whereby one could "assert personal identity as distinct from the aspirations, beliefs and behaviour of a dominant opponent" (Cyuma 2012:34). Such behaviour can be viewed as a perfectly logical way to defend oneself when reduced to long-term insignificance in a particular context. The ethos which emerged in this alternative community at Fedsem was one in which race, ethnicity, gender, denomination and

tradition transcended the social and ecumenical boundaries imposed externally. It prepared students to be equipped:

> with lasting skills in articulation – with skills of research so that we know how to pursue knowledge for ourselves - with skills to think independently and act independently and enjoy doing so rather than be threatened by it and with skills to be leaders on our own right and not be perpetual followers of others (Finca 1998:7).

In this it provided a subtle and effective challenge to Bantu education. An issue which was instrumental in bringing different traditions together as envisaged by Tambaram concerned to expose students to different denominational traditions in ministerial formation. The existence and perpetuation of these emphases often meant that students were denied formation for a holistic approach to ministry. Gqubule (1977:195) offers a good summary of the issues at stake:

> There are those who believe that devotional exercises should be compulsory. … Certainly at St Peter's all students were expected to share fully in the devotional life of the college. … 'Protestant' training had tended to stress the primacy of the academic and left decision on devotional life to the individual. The monastic traditions, as represented in this case by the Community of the Resurrection which ran the college, laid stress on compulsory corporate worship which had no real parallel in the Protestant tradition, questioned any exercise which was not freely entered into and always found itself embarrassed when it insisted on compulsory exercises. However, experience has taught that certain things in education cannot be left to individual inclination.

Gqubule, a Methodist, was writing in the light of almost fifteen years of experience at Fedsem, having arrived in 1960, where there had been considerable cross-fertilisation leading to a greater understanding, and sometimes appreciation, of other worship traditions.

With regard to teaching, there were some matters that were decided prior to the opening of Fedsem. By 1961,

> there was general agreement on courses and subjects to be taught. It was decided that St. Peter's College would provide its own Doctrine Course 'at least for the post Junior Certificate Students'. Before the Seminary opened we had to agree on what subjects were to be taught, the content of such subjects, the level at which teaching was to be done, the length of the courses, academic integrity and the standards of admission to the various courses. It was a thrilling time. We were exploring and breaking new ground. When we started

> we thought that the four Colleges could teach together only the Biblical subjects and possibly, Church History. Doctrine certainly, we thought, had to be taught denominationally. The provisional Academic Board had already discovered that the possibility of co-operative teaching was far greater than we had thought. Within a short time we were able to teach even Christian Doctrine together. It was decided also that English as a subject was to be taught from the beginning and that English was to be the medium of instruction (Gqubule 2010:26-28).

Theodore Simpson, Principal of St. Peter's, summarised the basic presuppositions that informed this approach. First, critical study of Scripture; then, theological reflection and interpretation of original events in the light of the contemporary needs of the Church; third, the relevance of historical theology; finally, the development of critical thinking in students (Simpson 1974).

Fedsem offered three programmes. The Diploma in Theology was a three year programme validated by the Joint Board for the Award of the Diploma in Theology. The Associateship of the Federal Theological Seminary (AFTS), a three year degree programme. The Certificate in Theology was awarded to those who did not meet the requirements of the Diploma but achieved a minimal level of attainment.

Desmond Tutu joined the staff of St Peter's College in 1966 and was to become a symbol of an innovative and, for its time, unique approach to theological education in South Africa as explained by Peter Lee:

> Although he was pioneering for black theologians and might well have been intimidated, the combination of theological qualifications and a classroom background stood for him in good stead. Student affairs at the seminary and next-door Fort Hare University, in the tense political environment which has always been the Eastern Cape, began to cause him to engage with the interface between the gospel and the issues of the day, at a time of acute tension both there and in the wider world. Naturally he was one of the few with some international experience and he was quick to become its interpreter to the students. He too was undergoing that thing called conscientisation (Lee 2005:376-377).

The focus on Black Theology, linked to Black Consciousness (BC), was to become one of the distinctive features of Fedsem's approach. The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) emphasised that

> ... the racial structure forced blacks to turn their aggressions inward upon themselves. They came to believe that black was a symbol of

> sinfulness and ugliness and that therefore as black people they were inferior and worthless (Himes 1971:55).

This was as true in South Africa as it was in the USA and was the occasion for the birth and development of the Black Consciousness Movement in which Fedsem played a significant role.

By 1970, it was clear that the syllabus at Fedsem was no longer meeting the perceived needs of many. This was the result of the majority of the staff being white and unable to enter existentially into an understanding of the black context in which their students would have to exercise their vocation. In August of that year, a conference was held at Stutterheim. This resulted in an agreement that there should be a greater degree of pastoral orientation to be achieved by studying thematically rather than according to the traditional disciplines. Consequently, a sub-committee consisting of Dr. Donald Cragg, Fr Theodore Simpson and student Sabelo Ntwasa:

> was established to prepare a draft of five themes for consideration. The results of this committee's work reflects …the influence of black theology. ... This was the first stage of a developing syllabus which acknowledged the need for a relevant teaching programme to meet the needs of the black minister in the real life situation of the Parish (Cameron 1984:94).

The themes were "Man [sic] in a diseased Society, Man's search for Meaning, Man's Self Estrangement, Man in the Church". This marked the beginning of a move towards interdisciplinary teaching at Fedsem which was developed and integrated into the Diploma and Certificate course until the end of 1984 by which time the themes studied were Hermeneutics and Contextualisation, Authority, Creation, Man and Sin, Person and Work of Christ, People of God and Mission and Evangelism (Cameron 1984:94).

A report of the Ministerial Training Commission was submitted to the Seminary Council on 4 August 1972:

> The influence of black theology also made itself felt in a major commission established by the Seminary Council. Its task was to study the future training of the ministry. ... The Council of the Seminary took pains to ensure that the membership of the Commission was predominantly black, and the Chairman was the Rt Rev Alphaeus Zulu (Cameron 1984:94).

Simon Gqubule summarised the spirit of Black Theology as it was understood at that time:

> Black Theology is an attempt to present the Christian gospel to the Black man relevantly with all its liberating power in the broadest sense of the word. It seeks to present Christian truth in an African dress, in the African idiom, with African insights, through the experiences of the Black man. It seeks to understand the Incarnation as the rooting of Christ in the hurly-burly of the Black man's life. It sees the crucifixion of Christ as representing the crucifixion of the Black man in shanty towns outside the towns and cities of this land where every slum becomes a Calvary. However, the Black Theology movement can only have meaning when the ebony sons and daughters of Africa themselves write and sing the glories of Him who called them 'out of darkness into His marvellous light' (Gqubule 1974:16-232).

Here was a hint of subversive black consciousness thinking popularized by Steve Biko who was also influential in Seminary circles (Denis & Duncan 2011:85). Biko became a member of University Christian Movement (UCM) formed in 1967 (Kretzschmar 1986:61) and was involved in its black caucus which gave birth to Black Theology, the religious complement to Black Consciousness (BC) philosophy.

> There stirred within his consciousness ... an idea. This was to flower into a student movement which conscientised blacks to analyse their socio-political condition by recognising that they could be their own liberators through resisting their oppression with a different mental attitude. It was this attitude that became known as 'Black Consciousness' (Wilson 1991:23).

This different mental attitude constituted an internalised concept of self-worth which was resistant to apartheid in passive-aggressive as well as overt forms of resistance. Black Theology encouraged black South Africans to reinterpret the Christian faith in the light of the specific realities of their situation (Halisi 1991:103). But it went beyond this seeking: "to do away with spiritual poverty of the black people" and affirmed "that Christianity is an adaptable religion that fits in with the cultural situation of the people to whom it is imparted" (Biko 2004:34) ie. it is a human centred society (Biko 2004:454) "where all commonly shared …" (Biko 2004:46). BC "takes cognisance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black" (Biko 2004:53). Further, it is a web of "attitudes, belief systems, cultural and political values" (Maphai 1991:131). For Biko,

> … Black consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude (Biko 2004:49).

This was a collaborative process. While Biko accepted the possible use of violence he did not promote it. He favoured other forms of protest and challenge.

For example, Fedsem was involved in the South African Students' Organisation (SASO). Sabelo Ntwasa, a Fedsem student, became the first organiser of the Black Theology project of the UCM. He published the papers held at the first conference in 1972, *Essays in Black Consciousness* (Nel 1994:140-141). FedSem was one of the places where Black Theology seminars were held. Biko visited Fedsem on numerous occasions *inter alia* to encourage the growth of the SASO at the University of Fort Hare and adjacent Fedsem (Stubbs 2004:179). A student at the time, Njongonkulu Ndungane (later Archbishop of Cape Town), commented on the value of Fedsem as

> a candle of hope in the arena of theological education during this period. It was a unique experiment in ecumenism that produced some of the finest church leaders of our time. Fedsem was a sign of hope for the black people (Ndungane 2003:9).

Biko's BC philosophy was grounded in *praxis* through self-help community projects which demonstrated that black people could work towards becoming masters of their own destiny. This was a part of Fedsem's ethos of training:

> men and women for a ministry relevant to the South African situation today, and ... to live as Christians in this situation. ... The students are trained as 'enablers'. The seminary's philosophy has been open to misinterpretation by a few who regard it is as a breeding-ground for revolutionaries. 'I wouldn't say this view exists as a strong element,' Dr Gqubule said. 'But it definitely does exist in certain church circles.' It is the seminary's ethos and colour-blind lifestyle, its members believe, that is the real reason for the expropriation of its property in Alice (Gqubule, Interview with Mignonne Rodel, 16 August 1977, Pietermaritzburg [*Natal Witness,* "The seminary that's built on loaves of bread" APC: PC 80/1/1/1]).

Becoming self-reliant was a significant attempt at challenging the hegemony of the Nationalist government which sought to kill the spirit and develop acquiescence in the minds and hearts of black people.

5. EXPROPRIATION

Graeme Brown, Principal of St Columba's College described the period from 1971-1974, as:

> a time of transition from a certain tranquillity to increasing turmoil, one was aware that ideas had been let loose which no constraint constructed by man could control. Over a long period passivity on the part of students had given way to a passion that justice be done and seen to be done in the land. ... Peaceful protest became almost part of the pattern of practical theology – the outworking of faith in the radical Jesus. The pulpit alone seemed to remain inviolate, where the Gospel could still be made meaningful in the context of the common life. There was no shortage of students for the ministry and many left the College as liberated people, who knew a message of reconciliation and hope (Graeme Brown, letter to Francois Bill [papers], UKZN, APC: PC 80/1/1/2).

Passivity had been replaced by peaceful protest leading to conscientisation. That peaceful protest would soon be implemented when the praxis form of education at Fedsem faced its strongest challenge from the government. Its activist approach led to expropriation.

On 26 November 1974 a notice of expropriation under section 13(1) of the Bantu Trust and Land Act, 1936 (Act 18 of 1936) was served on Fedsem. This brutal act has been variously described. One evaluation stated that:

> This institution ... symbolised the churches' autonomy from the state-imposed norms of Bantu theological education. It was significant for its ecumenical character and its being a centre for emerging black theology in the 1970s. ... the order to close Fedsem was one of the most vicious acts of the regime directed specifically at the churches and their policy of developing articulate black leadership (Cochrane *et al* 1999:45-46).

Fedsem was given only a few months to vacate its premises and by the time scheduled for departure from the campus, after intensive negotiations and international pressure had failed, everyone seemed to have accepted the inevitable. However, on 10 March 1975 the day for departure, a group of eight or nine students embarked on their distinctive form of passive aggressive resistance to the expropriation. As the removal vehicles arrived they blocked the path of the vans by lying in the road to prevent them from passing as a physical symbol of their rejection of the expropriation. They argued that it was incumbent on the community to resist the move. Both staff and students tried to persuade them to move in vain. Ultimately they were carried from the site of the protest and incarcerated in a side chapel of St Peter's chapel:

> We carried them and locked them up in St Peter's chapel. Some of these students were John Malalose, Steve Montjane, Jerry Mosala and Cecil Ngcokovane (Gqubule 2010:212).

The Seminary President, Theodore Simpson, tried to persuade the protesters to give up their resistance. This process took several days before the move was effected. One of the students Itumeleng (Jerry) Mosala commented:

> We tried to prevent the vacating of the seminary by blockading the removing trucks. As a result some of us were locked up in the chapel but the removal went ahead and the seminary was relocated in Umtata (Villa-Vicencio sa:193).

Stanley Mogoba, a new lecturer, recounted his reflection on the experience:

> Confronted with angry young students who looked to me to lead them in their defiance of the action by the state, I was obliged to look beyond the present moment to the long-term interests of theological education. I tried to persuade them to concede this battle. Well, students to do not take easily to that kind of counsel! I had discovered that struggle sometimes requires strategic concessions. Sometimes there is little to be gained through direct confrontation. I also discovered that the teaching of theology in South Africa is located in struggle (Gqubule 2010:78).

Mogoba was correct in his assessment of the role of direct confrontation. The symbolic blockade left a lasting impression on its witnesses and those who learned of this incident. But this response is not out of character when taken in the context of the educational philosophy of Fedsem. It became a source of reflection and further action.

The move from Alice began a five year period which would consolidate Fedsem. "... [I]t survived and became stronger on the process. The story of the "exile and agony" became a constituent part of its identity ..." (Simpson 1975). After a brief troubled sojourn in Umtata, on 20 August 1975, the Seminary Council accepted Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre's offer of accommodation, and in 1977 Adams United and St Columba's colleges merged to become Albert Luthuli College. The new Seminary was dedicated in Imbali, Pietermaritzburg during three days of celebrations from 15-17 August 1980.

6. FURTHER CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENT

Growth and development of the curriculum was the constant in Fedsem's educational approach. In December 1979, an experimental year for the third year of the Joint Board Diploma course was approved to begin in 1980 and "It was agreed to seek approval of the Faculty at Rhodes for

the new AFTS syllabus" (Minutes of the Academic Board, 11 December 1979, Fedsem archives, HPAL, UFH). One of Fedsem's external examiners, Gerald Hawkes, Rhodes University, commented cautiously:

> I think that interdisciplinary third year is a bold experiment. I am aware of a good number of difficulties in the way of such an experiment, through being involved in discussions about such an approach both in earlier years at Fedsem, and here at Rhodes. Now FedSem is taking the plunge ... (Hawkes to Kaltenrieder, 7 December 1981, Appendix to the Minutes of the Academic Board, 7 December 1981 [Natal Diocesan Archives: Fedsem 2.6.1]).

The interdisciplinary third year dealt with the following themes: Hermeneutics and Contextualisation, Authority, Creation, Man and Sin, Person and Work of Christ, People of God and Mission and Evangelism (Fedsem Blue Book 1984:63-68). This course was followed until 1984. Such a contextual approach became a problem *inter alia* in the negotiations to affiliate with Rhodes University.

On 17 April 1980, the Academic board agreed to a proposal recommending that Black Theology be given a recognised place in the curriculum (Fedsem Archives Box 4, HPAL, UFH). It was assigned to the Department of Systematic Theology.

Student perspectives on the passive aggressive approach to theological education were positively summed up by Tinyiko Maluleke:

> Purposely constructed as an independent, alternative and counter-hegemonic educational model, in a country where Blacks were deliberately fed an especially inferior diet of education called 'Bantu Education' and where Blacks had little access to institutions of higher learning, Fedsem was a total experience. At a time when black and White separation was legally justified and studiously enforced by a ruthless regime. Fedsem opened its doors to Black and White and even to male and female. In this way Fedsem was a small island of a multi-racial, multi-denominational and alternative community in a sea of a larger society where Black was Black and White was White – where Black was inferior and White was supreme. This reality about Fedsem was central to the 'theological' education that one 'received' there. Independent of government funding and political interference, Fedsem did not have to follow government syllabi and requirements; instead it became a site for pedagogical exploration and experimentation outside the confines of the rigid South African educational system. The leading pedagogical question was 'what do you think?' rather than 'what do you remember?'. Again and again, in all subjects, the young rebellious, radical and multi-racial team of lecturers, many of whom had been educated outside South Africa,

> confronted us with questions whose answers could not be found in any book – 'what do you think?' In the context of the closed country that South Africa was and the closed educational system that was in place – this was a liberatingly subversive question. In my journey as an academic, pastor and human being, Fedsem will always be the place where I experienced the most liberating intellectual possibilities (Maluleke 2006:302).

An interesting comment is offered by a white student at Fedsem, Peter Grassow (1981-1984, correspondence with Philippe Denis, 12 August 2011.): "The seminary was a place of personal transformation, and caused me to be committed to participating in social change. I never regretted going there".

> This curriculum was subliminally subversive and originated in exposure to the range of political theologies which were current in the United States, Latin America, Europe and Africa and were beginning to be promoted. Students were encouraged to think for themselves, reach their own conclusions and strive towards attaining their full potential. At an unofficial level there were the effects of the living arrangements and extra-curricular activities including student meetings, sports, celebrations and drama. This encouraged negotiation, forebearance and understanding of others and their traditions (Finca 1998:6).

7. AFFILIATION WITH RHODES UNIVERSITY

From 1977, there was a renewed attempt (Denis & Duncan 2011:138) to affiliate Fedsem with Rhodes University. This would involve Fedsem students preparing for the ThB degree ceding full control of the curriculum to Rhodes. Originally, there had been strong resistance from the Anglicans and Congregationalists against formal links with any university under state (ie. Bantu education) control. This would negatively impact on freedom to design the curriculum. The prevailing "political ideology" had already been given as a reason for disassociation from links with UNISA (Denis & Duncan 2011:139). A number of staff members voiced their concerns regarding affiliation. From 1978, twelve Fedsem students were registered with Rhodes, though no students actually attended Rhodes until mid-1979, in a situation where

> Fedsem had hoped to have a say in the curriculum designed by academics with no experience of the circumstances of black candidates for the ministry (Denis & Duncan 2011:139);

however the "colleagues from Rhodes would not accede to their request" due to Rhodes Senate regulations (Denis & Duncan 2011:139). Student Desmond van der Water (e-mail to Philippe Denis, 21 August 1997) summarised his personal experience:

> We were something of a novelty and curiosity. ... other black students used to refer to us as the 'God-squad'. As the first black students at the Divinity Faculty we were constantly under scrutiny by other students and lecturers so we worked very hard to make a success. ... our biggest contribution was, ... a political one as our presence there was a political challenge to the state, but also to the racial prejudices of white students (including theological students), and to our respective churches.

Here is an example of passive aggressive resistance occasioned merely by physical presence as a challenge to the dominant hegemony of a presumed liberal university like Rhodes.

Initial support for affiliation began to wane as a result of "the radicalisation of student politics in South Africa" and the proximity of Natal University with its new BTh programme (Denis & Duncan 2011:154). Problems with Rhodes led Fedsem to reinvigorate the AFTS programme. A new option was added in Ethics and Society somewhat later in 1988 which

> dealt with such themes as liberation theology, black theology, revolution and violence, women in the church and religion and social change (Denis & Duncan 2011:146).

Yet, opposition towards the Rhodes affiliation was beginning to grow and it centred around the ethos of the curriculum. The Academic Board was clear that:

> The need to preserve the ethos of the Seminary was emphasised as was the need to maintain and develop Black Theology and African Studies (Minutes, Academic Board [1982-1983], 9 September 1982, Fedsem Box 4, HPAL, UFH).

On 14 May 1985, an actual motion not to affiliate came before the Seminary Council from the Academic Board citing as one reason: "It will rob Fedsem of its unique, and to some of us its very special, character" (Minutes, Academic Board, 9 May 1985, Fedsem Box 25, HPAL, UFH). A student view was that "Affiliation would deprive the Seminary of its independence" (Meeting, Executive Committee and student body, 14 May 1985 [Nuttall Papers: 5.5]). On 15 August 1986, a student memorandum stated:

> After being informed that Liberation Theology and Black Theology were probably not offered at Rhodes a student said that he believed that affiliation would compromise the Seminary and jeopardise the federal structure (Ronnie Alexander files).

This issue of state control became the centre of staff opposition:

> It is clear that under affiliation arrangements government control will be inevitable. The following clauses from Section 33 of Rhodes University (Private) Act, No. 15/1949, support the above statement. ... While these overseas universities were gladly accepting our products, South African universities were not prepared, for some time, to recognise the qualifications of our products. Is it out of sheer embarrassment that they are now prepared to accept our candidates due to the reputation we have built up without their support in international circles? (Memorandum from staff members against Rhodes affiliation, 25 August 1986 [UFH, HPAL: Fedsem Archives: Box 23: Miscellaneous 1984-1986]).

Half of the staff remained opposed to the Rhodes arrangement and the students renewed their protest. The Seminary Council in September 1986 decided not to proceed with the proposed arrangement with Rhodes (Minutes of Academic Board, 26 September 1986, NDA). The Rhodes affiliation matter demonstrated that Fedsem would not willingly give up what she had striven for with such tenacity.

By this time, South Africa was in the throes of states of emergency and growing resistance. Some of that resistance within Fedsem was expressed in the course of its worship life.

8. PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE RESISTANCE IN WORSHIP

The role of worship at Fedsem was not simply a matter of pious devotion. It was part of the "total experience" of integration that constituted the ethos of the seminary. It was a constituent of the *letiourgia* (work) of the people of God. Consequently, it was a focus of the life of the community which took many and varied forms. One of these was to mark or commemorate significant days in the history of the black struggle. This was part of Fedsem's tradition. An example which was so inflammatory took place soon after the Seminary moved to Umtata and led to Fedsem leaving Umtata. On 24th March 1975, a Heroes' Day service took place in Ngangelizwe township, Umtata:

> Shortly after this relocation some students and black staff organised a Heroes' Day Service (in Ngangelizwe, Umtata), which resulted in

> Kaiser Matanzima (Chief Minister of the Transkei at the time) insisting that those responsible for organising the service be expelled by the seminary. While disciplinary hearings were still underway Matanzima took further action, demanding that the seminary leave the Transkei (Villa-Vicencio sa:212-213).

There followed a confrontation between BCM students and the seminary staff arising out of the distribution of an old SASO document which listed government acts of oppression during the twentieth century.

These services which continued throughout the life of Fedsem became part of the official worship calendar of Fedsem. On the subject of public holidays to commemorate special days:

> It was agreed to recommend: 21 March Heroes Day / Ascension Day / 1 May – May Day / 16 June / 12 September Biko Day with special devotions. It was felt that the Academic Board should give consideration to celebrating the Seminary's Founders' Day as a public holiday (Minutes, Worship Committee, 12 August 1986, Fedsem Archives, Box 7: Committee 1972-1986, HPAL, UFH).

Additional occasions were also organised as need arose.

There were other events in the country that required a response of some kind and Fedsem responded with an act of liturgy to display its concern:

> On 29 October 1983, four students and an Inkatha supporter were killed and many others injured in a clash between students and a group of approximately 500 Inkatha supporters at the University of Zululand (Ongoye), south of Empangeni (News24).

A group of Zululand University students visited Fedsem to share information regarding the events and to seek support in any form. The Seminar Worship Committee took up the matter and:

> After discussion on the question of having a service to remember those killed at uNgoye, it was decided not to add to the number of these services but to include such a remembrance in existing services (Minutes, Worship Committee, 1 November 1985, Fedsem Archives, Box 7: Committee 1972-1986, UFH, HPAL).

Commemorative services were one means by which the seminary community could express its feelings and resentments regarding national events that affected them negatively. Any attempt to disregard this was taken very badly even when the threat came from within such as happened on occasion when there was an attempt to close Fedsem before June 16th. On one occasion, on l4 June 1981, a seven-day class boycott took place.

Student grievances resulted from a refusal by the Fedsem authorities to allow a memorial service at the institution on June 16, and the general dissatisfaction among the students over the manner in which the matter was handled (*Natal Witness*, Saturday 13 June 1991, quoted in Forsyth 1991:22). This is an example of passive-aggressive resistance to perceived oppression within the campus.

It is interesting that when tragedies and crises touched the Fedsem community, the first response was to turn to God in worship rather than reflect theologically on the meaning of the events. That would always come later. Such an event occurred on 10 June 1982 when community member, Duma Gqubule, son of the Principal of John Wesley College, and six other Imbali men, was arrested. The result was a service at St. Mark's Imbali, on Sunday 18 July for those in detention (Minutes, Academic Board, 20 July 1982, Fedsem Archives: Box 4: Academic Board 1982-1983, HPAL, UFH).

However, worship opportunities were not only reserved for Fedsem alone. The annual passion play, staged during the last week of the first term drew hundreds of community members to Fedsem to participate in Fedsem's interpretation of the passion of Christ. This was community worship at its most intense and was normally interpreted by the students as a representation of resistance to oppression in the first century CE. But there were other occasions of community worship sponsored by Fedsem. For instance, in 1985:

> The Convener (Graham Duncan) reported that he had met with the chaplains and with representatives of the Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches (PCC). A proposal had come from PCC requesting that a joint service be held on 16th June. ... It was noted that this would be a good opportunity to join in worship with the local community (Minutes, Worship Committee, 4 June 1985, Fedsem Archives, Box 7: Committee 1972-1986, HPAL, UFH).

The service took place at St Mark's Anglican Church (Kerchhoff 2002:167). Here is an example of how a passive-aggressive form of resistance could evoke a brutal and unwarranted response.

These and other services presented opportunities to commemorate important events and signify a challenge that victims of apartheid could not be silenced totally but had their own subversive means of staging protests. This demonstrates the power of worship to touch human beings, particularly those in power at the source of their insecurity, even when they are not present. They also provided an opportunity to experiment with different ways of organising worship services, especially when collaboration was vital to meet the needs of everyone in the community.

Even acts of worship could be viewed as a challenge to illegitimate power. In such situations, events gave rise to worship and worship provided the opportunity for reflection and subsequent response. Other para-liturgical demonstrations provided evidence of passive-aggressive commitment.

9. REPUBLIC DAY, 1981

On 2 May 1981, the twentieth anniversary of the declaration of the Republic of South Africa, a group of around thirty Fedsem students staged a peaceful demonstration in the grounds of the Anglican cathedral in Pietermaritzburg during a government sponsored celebration parade. This took place in the context of the city's boycott of the Republic Festival (Perry & Perry 1992:174). The Fedsem contingent stood in the cathedral grounds with their backs to the parade as it passed:

> Faithful to its tradition of resistance, Fedsem went to town, dressed up in clerical garb. We cheered the tattooed military staff with 'Onward Christian soldiers marching into war (Mtetwa 1995:183).

The chairman of the Student's Representative Council, Mr Howard Skomolo, said:

> One member of the Special Branch told us that we were contravening the Riotous Assemblies Act and that we should have applied to a magistrate for permission to line ourselves there (*Natal Witness*, 6 May 1981).

A little later, the police arrived at Fedsem to arrest the participants in the demonstration. The Fedsem community responded with classic passive-aggressive resistance. As their colleagues were being herded into police vans, the other students ran to the dining hall and brought trays of tea for the police and offered this token with the Christian greeting of "Peace be with you"!

> By exaggerating their compliance to the point of mockery, they openly showed their contempt for the proceedings while making it difficult for the guards to take action against them (Scott 1990:139).

Given that this hidden attack is a very much postponed revenge, passive aggressive people take genuine pleasure here and now in frustrating others. It was an act of "subversive subservience" (de Kock 1996:105-140). This incident was both a demonstration and an act of civil disobedience.

10. CONCLUSION

The factors which define racial conduct and passive–aggressive behaviour were all evident in the conduct evidenced at Fedsem which challenged power in latent and covert forms. It was used as an existentialist defence mechanism to express and maintain identity in an alien environment of extreme ideological conflict which, in South Africa, was beginning to draw to a close.

With the opening of South African universities to students of all races as the end of apartheid approached and increasing financial and other problems, Fedsem's days were numbered. The institution closed in December 1993. Latterly, passive-aggressive resistance through boycott became internalised as the result of perceived injustice within the campus as a non-violent response to perceived threats. It was part of the *modus operandi* of Fedsem, but more than that, it was central to its ethos. Fedsem's formation programmes, integrated into its worship life, were part of the struggle to achieve a peaceful just society in which, through the agency of theologically trained ministers, each person could be empowered to reach their God-given potential in life and "have it in all its fullness" (John 10:10).

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