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I am in trouble: my deadline to write this article is not just looming, it has come and gone. Then, with some panic, I contact the editor to apologise and he kindly suggests a new deadline.

Thank you! Phew. Then, I miss that deadline also. I sit staring at the screen, uninspired, searching for the impetus to write something. Especially something that will take my mind off the disturbing experience I have had this past week. But the more I try, the blanker the screen.

To be honest, I would like to tell you about what happened this week, but I'm almost too ashamed and scared. Almost.

I am an Afrikaans-speaking white woman and this week I wished that I could be something else. I did not want to be white, I did not want to be Afrikaans-speaking and I did not want to be a woman. In one incident I experienced the darkest part of each one of those elements of my identity.

There was an incident at my daughter's school where I could see that some white parents had no idea how their actions were perpetuating the deep negative prejudice white people carry with regards to black people. Their intentions were quite the opposite: it was to help black children.

But the way they wanted to help would teach our young daughter something about the misplaced power of being white. It simply could not happen.

So my husband responded to the parents' letter with a few suggestions to change the way

in which the help was provided. He asked that we really consider how the black children might feel when they received the help and how the white children might interpret their giving. So far, so good.

The wheels started coming off when the parents who were organising the event started to respond to my husband's suggestions. They were offended. They felt unfairly criticised and judged to be racists, which they stated they were not. They argued that he had serious issues, he suffered white guilt, he was a racist and he saw colour where it did not exist.

This was tough to swallow for two reasons – the immediate, intense and impenetrable defensiveness that shouted “How dare you say these things?” and the incredible stance taken from their high horse that claimed “Our children don't see race”.

The big blow came when their e-mails read “...and with this letter we consider the case closed”, because that moment of unilateral severing of dialogue made the years of Afrikaner hard-headedness, pride and arrogance come screaming back at me. It was like a button pushed on a DVD player to show me snippets of the past, of selfish and patronising acts of superiority.

It brought back memories from school: the wagging finger from teachers à la PW Botha, the “thou shalt not question” climate in every classroom and Sunday morning in Sunday school. It reminded me of the suffocation and the confusion.

“Awareness releases reality to change you.”

Anthony de Mello

And about how scared I was of stepping out of line. So this woman's e-mail pushed me into a feeling of detached depression about having this trait in me, around me, close to me - one of the darkest characteristics of the Afrikaner.

As if this was not enough, the debacle also made me feel depressed about being white. The fact that white parents, who have white children that go to white schools led by white teachers, think their children do not see race when the cleaning staff, groundsman and gate-keeper are black, scares me. Is this denial, naivety or just plain unconsciousness? If this is what white people think in 2010, what will it take to wake them up?

How can White Afrikaners do something seriously impactful about building a nation if they think their children are growing up in a world where race does not matter? Is whiteness that doomed? That blind?

So, being a white Afrikaner the past week was tough. But more was to come: the group who responded to my husband were all women. And they came out guns blazing in a way that only women can do. The indignation in their voices escalated into them playing the victims of a brutal man who was being an unfair bully.

Why is it so rare for women to stand up and talk through tough issues without crying,

taking it personally and showing cat claws? Tears are like blunt objects, a friend reminds me – they are a weapon. It forces the person on the receiving end into the role of the perpetrator. It closes down dialogue. Please don't misunderstand me – I'm all for sharing and showing emotion, but I'm referring to the dark female quality of slipping into a victim space when there are other options available. I saw it in them this week. I see it in myself and it brings up a feeling of shame I wish I could kick into touch or hide away.

So, here I am staring at a screen filled with heavy words. It is Sunday evening, it is a warm summer's evening and I should be planning my week and getting things ready. But I am compelled to just sit here for a while to grapple with the dark side of being white, being an Afrikaner and being a woman.

Anthony de Mello says “Awareness releases reality to change you”, and this week delivered a truck-load of awareness.

Thank you to the women who made me so angry, so depressed; it woke me up. I am finally utterly fed up and tired with my misplaced tears when I face a tough situation. I am more certain than ever that it takes hard work to understand what it takes to be a good citizen in the quest to build our nation. And I will remind myself that being Afrikaans does not mean that I am doomed to be stubborn.