

# Symbolic Reparations: A fractured opportunity

by

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We buried them for what they were  
Our fallen heroes and our history ...  
A monument in our hearts we shall mount  
Their unheard-of names to engrave  
On time's sturdy wings their ideal we shall pin  
Africa's priceless heritage to mankind - Sepamla

## Introduction

The report is primarily a discussion document that seeks to record some of the initiatives that government, communities and civil society have engaged upon with regards to memorialisation initiatives. In documenting these initiatives, the report highlights some of the challenges and successes that major stakeholders face, as well as the needs of victims and communities around memorialisation processes. In accordance with these needs and challenges the report through the recommendations, outlines some of the possible actions that can be implemented to build relationships between stakeholders as well as ensure that government, civil society and communities work together to ensure that memorialisation can achieve its extensive potential as a form of symbolic reparations. The report therefore will be distributed mainly to non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and community based organisations (CBO's) as a guiding document that could inform some of the initial intervention strategies as well as open up spaces for further discussion and interaction amongst those working within the fields of public memory.

## Background

They (victims) have waited long, too long for their reparations. As a nation we have a legal but, more importantly, a moral obligation to honour in paying reparations. – Archbishop Desmond Tutu ([Phalane, 2003](#))

With its inception in 1996, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) presented a beacon of hope for reconciliation and healing by delving into the past of a previously divided nation. In its attempt at uncovering the truth around the gross human rights violations, injustices and human suffering, the TRC aimed at simultaneously re-creating and reconstituting a national narrative that saw a nation coming to terms with its past.

As part of its final report in 1998, the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee (RRC) of the TRC recommended that reparations as legal and moral obligations to survivors of gross

human rights violations was necessary to 'restore human and civil dignity' and enable victims to come to terms with the past. It was recommended that a reparations policy should be guided by the following principles: redress, restitution, rehabilitation, restoration of dignity and reassurance of non-repetition. In keeping with these principles, urgent interim reparations, individual reparations, symbolic reparations, community rehabilitation programmes and institutional reform were viewed as the most desirable forms of reparations. However, taking into account the complexity of the TRC process itself and the fact that "virtually every Black South African can be said to be a victim of human rights abuse" the RRC recommended that the various forms of reparations were not to be implemented in isolation of each other but complement each other so as to acknowledge both those victims that testified before the Commission as well as those who comprise the broader South African collective (TRC Report, 2003).

According to the TRC report, symbolic reparations refer to measures that facilitate the "communal process of remembering and commemorating the pain and victories of the past." Such measures, which are seen as mechanisms to restore the dignity of victims and survivors, include exhumations, tombstones, memorials and monuments and the renaming of streets and public facilities. In acknowledging the role of civil society in the process of reconciliation and healing, the RRC argued that reparations should be viewed as a "national project" that is a "multi-faceted process and can be approached from many sides by different people (TRC Report, 2003).

Rassool, in his work around memorialisation and the TRC, argues that there has been a tendency by government to shift the focus from financial compensation to issues of community restitution and symbolic reparations (Rassool et. al., 2000). This view was exemplified in President Thabo Mbeki's speech on 15 April 2003 at the tabling of the TRC's final report in Parliament. He stated that victims who had testified before the Commission were to be given a once off payment of R 30 000 each. While many victims met this decision with disappointment, the President, in focussing on issues of symbolic reparation and community restitution, indicated that the implementation of an integrated and comprehensive reparations strategy would further compensate victims and the nation at large. He added that government both acknowledged and accepted the recommendations relating to symbolic reparations<sup>1</sup> around the "struggle and the ideal of freedom" (Mbeki, 2003). It is within this context of the complex, ongoing debate around reparations, that the following report seeks to examine some of the state and civil society initiatives around memorialisation within South Africa.

### **Methodology**

The report relies mainly on qualitative information that was gathered via interviews and focus groups using a semi structured interview schedule. A purposive sampling strategy was used to elicit information from survivors, scholars, provincial government officials and individuals working within the fields of memory and memorialisation (See List of References). Three focus groups were conducted with survivor groups and 16 in depth interviews were conducted with individuals.

A literature review of key readings around issues of memory and memorialisation; the TRC report and media coverage around the TRC and reparations, was undertaken to further expand on the interview findings. A web search of legacy projects was undertaken to

understand and gain more insight into some of the current national memorialisation initiatives.

### ***Limitations***

Due to both financial and time constraints the research was located within the urban areas of Gauteng and Western Cape with a very small sample group. As a result of the geographical bias and the limitations of the sample size, the research is by no means representative of South Africa as a whole. However, as an initial phase, the report, as previously stated, aims at exposing some of the issues and challenges around memorialisation as a form of symbolic reparations<sup>2</sup> as well as providing a platform for discussion and further investigation within this field.

## **Memorialisation as a Form of Symbolic Reparations**

### **An Integrated Reparations Strategy**

One lady said ... I did get the initial reparations from the TRC, but what I did [was that] I bought myself a fridge and a stove but I never did anything towards maybe putting a headstone on my child's grave. (Interview Phili, 2003)

You can choose to give in monetary terms, but you can also choose to say how you remember this past as a form of giving back in the long term. Because money is something that you can take and give to people and it will be used. (Interview Solani, 2002)

There's a need to balance the delivery on some of the social quandaries ... and the symbolic stuff that is taking place. In other words its all well and good to take John Voster bridge and rename it the Steve Biko bridge ... and then we will put up a statue or something else the other week, but if there's no houses built in that week, then its only a matter of time before the programme collapses. (Interview Biko, 2002)

As highlighted in the RRC report, reparations are significant mechanisms within post conflict societies as they allow spaces for mourning, individual and collective recognition of victims and promote national processes of reconciliation. However, while it has been noted that symbolic reparations are significant national and communal processes, the RRC also noted that symbolic reparations such as museums and monuments need to be linked to processes that seek to improve the daily socio-economic conditions of victims and their communities. Survivors, scholars, government officials and field workers alike have reiterated this view. However, thus far there has been no attempt by government to offer a coordinated, integrated and holistic reparations strategy. While there are a variety of reasons for the inherent lack of such a strategy, one of the reasons for this lack was highlighted by Mr. Biko,<sup>3</sup> who, argued that there is a general lack of understanding and insensitivity around the purpose of reparations, where reparations are equated with enrichment and financial benefits (Interview Biko, 2002).

However, in a transitional democracy like South Africa, poverty remains one of the major

challenges that government has to redress. It is within this context that financial reparations cannot, alone, serve purposes of acknowledging loss, remembering and promoting social justice. Financial reparations, as exemplified by Mr. Philli's and Mr. Solani's statements above, can only serve momentary material purposes and can therefore only be one part of the reparations strategy. Alternately, symbolic reparations through memorialisation, cannot alone address the needs of the victims or communities who still strive to afford basic needs such as education, health care and housing (Focus group Khulumani Cape Town, 2003; Khulumani Johannesburg, 2003; Khumbula, 2003). For reparations to fully achieve its potential it is necessary that corrective, rehabilitative social programmes are developed to meet the economic, social and psychological needs of victims, communities and the South African society at large (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003).

### *Memory and memorialisation*

... Memorialisation is important in the same way that I think uncovering the past [is], making the past known to current generations is an important project ... but I also think that it should be an area of contestation. (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003)

[Memorialisation] mainly pertains to the articulation of what actually happens as far as victims of conflicts are concerned ... in most instances you would find that they have been somehow forgotten and putting up a memorial sort of connects them with the actual incidents that have happened leading to gross human rights abuses. (Interview Phili, 2003)

People feel that what came out of the TRC was not the whole truth, they think there's still more truth to be known and some feel that the TRC favoured a few individuals. (Interview Mathabathe, 2002)

Since collective memory as a social construct is often in keeping with the prevailing ideas and values of the dominant ruling group, in many post conflict societies such as Guatemala, El Salvador and South Africa, memorials have become a significant part of the transformation and transitional justice process. While truth commissions have acknowledged that reparations, in any form, can not and will not compensate for the human suffering, trauma and loss undergone by victims during conflict, memorials have become a means of re-claiming an oppressed history; remembrance in honouring those that have died or that have been victimised during conflict; as well as re-constructing social identities. However, given the complexity of memory and its often-subjective nature, memories are often distinct from and in conflict with the actual recorded history, as collective memory often serves political functions (Cairns and Roe, 2003).

In its function as a political tool, memory is linked directly to social remembering and forgetting. In post-conflict situations, for the purposes of re-writing national narratives, memory is used to select and distort the past to serve present political interests (Cairns and Roe, 2003). Furthermore, in this political function, memory, as in the case of South Africa, can be used by the state to impose an artificial collective or social identity on the nation. This not only has negative consequences upon the healing of victims but also assigns victims to a liminal space where they are recognised as both a part of the society but at the same time remain removed from the society ([Hamber and Wilson, 1999](#)). Furthermore, in

pursuing national political interests, the state can further marginalize those groups that have been previously marginalized by focussing mainly on the heroes and famous people of the struggle during the conflict. Roe, in his examination of social memory as a process in social identity formation argues that collective self-esteem through memory is one of the ways in which social or political identity is constructed through collective memory. He further argues that collective self-esteem is demonstrated by the dominant political or social group in its inclination to claim and highlight famous persons/heroes as part of that group (Cairns and Roe, 2003). This notion of the dominant group highlighting the role of famous people within their own group is significant to the process of memorialisation as it will be shown later in the report that the memory of famous heroes of the struggle are commemorated through monuments and memorials to meet the political agenda of the ANC led government, often at the risk of further alienating those already marginalized groups and individuals that were central to the liberation struggle.

Memorials as a significant part of the backdrop of collective memory in post conflict nations such as South Africa have become a mechanism via which victims and survivors can become active agents in the process of history by reinventing themselves and re-telling their stories for themselves and generations to come. Since memory isn't a static process but one that is constructed by experiences, images and emotions, memory as a concept that is represented via memorials has come to present various challenges for those working within the fields of memory and memorialisation. According to Field, "memory is much more than the recall of past stimuli. It involves emotion, will and creativity in the reconstruction of the past to serve present needs" (Field, 1999). The debate around the complexity of memory is further exemplified by Becker in her example of the clash around the Vietnam Memorial Monument. The debate around the memorial not only represented a split in memory of the war but also amplified the complexity of public memory and mourning. "People were right to protest: how something is remembered, the image it is given in perpetuity is how it would be understood historically" (Becker, 1999). It is within this complexity of remembering and forgetting by actively constructing and attempting to 'represent' the multiple stories of victims and survivors of conflict that memorialisation has the promise of promoting human rights, pursuing issues of transitional justice and nation building.

### *Reconciliation and memorialisation*

I think that Black people in general have bent over backwards to reconcile and I think that says a lot about South Africans ... I want to make this point again that symbolism can only play a very small part in solving our problems. (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003)

Take for example the Katlehong issue ... reconciliation was never affected because you don't have both parties taking responsibility in managing the memorial and also running activities around the memorial. (Interview Ramphele, 2003)

Memorialisation is not going to resolve that [reparations] issue ... [but] at least we can show people that here is an effort to reconcile you with what you have lost ... and I am not talking about reconciliation between the old and the new. I'm talking about reconciling ourselves with ourselves. (Focus group Khumbula, 2003)

According to [Hamber and Wilson](#), the process of uncovering the past, more specifically here through memorialisation, allows a country to develop a common and shared memory thereby creating a sense of unity and reconciliation (Hamber and Wilson, 1999). Memorials, in bringing various stakeholders (which may include victims, perpetrators and families) together into a public space of remembering, can and may serve as vehicles of reconciliation. Hamber and Wilson argue that "objects exchanged are never completely separate from people that exchange them and the social context of exchange is replete with rights and responsibilities." Furthermore, reparation as a form of healing and reconciliation cannot occur with the mere delivery of a memorial but through the process that takes place around the memorial (object) (Hamber and Wilson, 1999). It is therefore within this framework of the rights and responsibilities of 'gifting' and the processes around 'gifting' that healing and true reconciliation can begin to take place.

In keeping with issues around the processes that occur around memorials, there was general agreement amongst survivors, scholars, and those working within the field of public memory that memorials as a form of symbolic reparations did have a potential for reconciliation. However, those working within the field of public memory as well as scholars voiced their scepticism around the processes of memorialisation and how these processes actually detract from effecting reconciliation. This was exemplified most specifically through the political and gender bias around consultation, the lack of representivity and the marginalised role of the community within the process.

Mr. Nieftagodien argued, through the example of the Sam Ntuli Monument in Thokoza that as a result of the shifting of objectives of the memorial, that the memorial only achieved "momentary reconciliation." He argued that the memorial was initially conceived to honour all those people who died in the political violence between the ANC and IFP in Thokoza during the early 90s. However, instead of memorialising the victims of the violence from the local area, hostels and the township, the actual process became an attempt to reconcile the ANC and the IFP political parties (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003). This is further illustrated in Kgalema's study of the Thokoza monument in his description of the conflict experienced during the naming and the unveiling ceremony of the monument. The naming process of the monument reflected the political divisions within the community as ANC supporters suggested that the monument be named after a local ANC hero, Sam Luthuli, while the IFP for political reasons, rejected the name. The monument was eventually called the Thokoza Memorial to acknowledge all those who died as a result of the political violence.

Furthermore, both President Mbeki and Minister Buthelezi used the unveiling ceremony to promote reconciliation between the two political factions. This was exemplified in both their speeches with the President telling the community that "happily we have refocused our attention on the fact that as members of the Inkatha and ANC we come from the same constituency" while Minister Buthelezi in his address said, "we must change the hearts and minds of the people of Thokoza, and the minds of our people in general, for peace to triumph" ([Kgalema, 1999](#)). Kgalema acknowledges that the practice of collaboration in the memorialisation process served as a tool to build relationships between the IFP and ANC and on a broader level reconciliation within the community. However, the Thokoza Memorial, in its failure to bring true meaning to the surviving families and community at large, has been unable to wholly benefit the community by reaching its full potential as a memorial. Mr. Solani, the Khulumani Johannesburg group as well as a government official

highlighted the failure of the memorial to facilitate reconciliation amongst the people of Thokoza. According to Khulumani, as a result of a lack of community and individual ownership, the Thokoza Memorial has been unsuccessful in being a sustainable asset to the community as it often remains closed and locked, with no forwarding contact numbers available for visitors to the site (Interview Khulumani Johannesburg, 2003). The issue of the lack of sustainability has also been linked to Mr. Niefertgodien's argument that the memorial only achieved "momentary reconciliation" as it was stated by a government official that, "reconciliation was never effected because both parties [didn't] take responsibility in managing and also running activities around the memorial. There is still somebody who blames somebody for erecting the memorial" (Interview government official, 2003). Furthermore, Mr Solani, in his reading of the memorial, argues that due to the fact that the memorial merely lists the names of victims with no contextual information as to whether the victims belonged to a political party or not, has resulted in the memorial failing to fully address the communal mourning of the people of Thokoza as well as highlighting the various dynamics of the conflict. He argues that if the names of victims were noted along with the political affiliations or non-political status, then it could be highlighted through the monument that various people, active and inactive in the conflict, were victims and that the community collectively remembered and mourned all of them as victims of the conflict. In so doing, the community of Thokoza would be able to progress one step closer towards reconciliation and become a model for other communities in South Africa that have not as yet begun to address such issues (Interview Solani, 2002).

## **National Legacy Projects – State Initiatives**

### **Re-writing History**

[Memorials] need to be there so that we don't forget and if we don't forget we'll always be conscious of it ... if you are careful ... and you are conscious ... you'll be developing in [the] right direction and say let us respect each other. (Interview Solani, 2003)

Memorials, like memory, mediate the past, present and future (Davison, 1998). For South Africa then, the role of memorials can be viewed as a re-writing of the history of a nation, remembering and honouring the victims and survivors of human rights violations, as well as reaffirming the moral imperative of 'never again.' In attempting to redress issues of the past, the democratic government is still faced with the challenge of creating a national identity within a context of reconciliation. The revision of heritage practice in South Africa has therefore become an explicit means of reshaping public memory and building a national identity.

The National Legacy Project, officially constituted in 1996, was aimed at communicating the rich cultural diversity and celebrating the multicultural heritage of South Africa. The challenge for the Department of Arts Culture Science and Technology was seen as "finding the balance between the representation of the past and present in a manner which seeks to define museums, monuments and memorials as change agents to view and speculate on our history" ([DACST, 2002](#)). The pilot projects that were launched as a part of the Legacy Project are Chief Albert Luthuli Commemoration; Blood River Commemoration; Women's Monument; Samora Machel Memorial; Centenary of the Anglo Boer War; Nelson Mandela Museum; Freedom Park and Constitution Hill. Some of the guiding principles of the legacy

projects such as capacity building and economic opportunities; redress; gender sensitivity; consultation etc. were developed to "harmonise the many initiatives, and to ensure integrity, inclusiveness, balance and broad participation" (DACST, 2002).

### *The Politics of Representation*

... There is always the danger that the dominant political party will put resources into memorialising its particular narrative of the past ... I think that needs to be contested ... I think the tendency has been to memorialise certain great people that invariably means great men. (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003)

... We know President Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Thabo Mbeki and the Robben Islanders ... I also had uncles on Robben Island ... we feel that government must come and recognise us, [it] doesn't matter how little we have done, but we need the recognition of what we have done towards the liberation struggle of South Africa. (Focus group Khulumani Cape Town, 2003)

I think memory has been used very selectively ... yes, there are people who made a hell of a contribution to this country [and] to the liberation struggle and its not always possible to recognise everybody. But I believe there needs to be an attempt to do that. (Interview Abrahams, 2002)

In the process of defining a national identity through the Legacy Projects, the South African state has begun to use the process of memorialisation as a mechanism to not only represent itself but also define the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' within and outside the nation. However, as Davison argues, the constitution of national identity is continually contested and changing – a space where 'nationhood,' like community is an imagined reality (Davison, 1998). The complexity of the use of memorialisation as a vehicle in national identity re–presentation and creation, is further argued by Zedde in her study of museums in various post conflict societies. Zedde argues that since national identity emphasises commonalities, within the context of state museums (and memorials) these representations are often reduced to generalisations at the risk of marginalizing and disinheriting other social, ethnic and religious groupings that are outside the mainstream ([Zedde, 1998](#)).

Memorials [should] not [be] politicised because they represent all members of the community ... who exist only as human beings in a community. (Interview Ramphele, 2003)

... It seems to me for South Africa to memorialise certain people ... certain areas, even certain political movements becomes a problem ... do we just memorialise the ANC ... what about the PAC and other people who struggled. (Interview Thornton, 2002)

... It seems government is choosing who [to memorialise and] what to put up for whom [because] there are many people who died in the country and [these] people are not recognised (Focus group Khulumani Johannesburg, 2003)

In keeping with these debates around state narratives in the memorialisation process, scholars, government officials and survivors argued about the inherent lack of



representation of the 'ordinary' person's and individual narratives within the Legacy Projects. By concentrating on individuals<sup>4</sup> and events, the South African state has inadvertently distracted the nation from remembering regular activists and the South African collective that have been victims of injustices and human rights violations. Furthermore, in acknowledging state initiatives around memorialisation and recognising the need for the state to create a national narrative as well as a balance between the Apartheid memorialisations of the past, Mr. Nieftagodien argues that due to narrow conceptions around memorialisation, that state processes of memorialisation have simplistically tried to "replace white men with black men." This he argued was further marginalizing groups such as women and the working-class groups that have made the most significant contribution to the liberation struggle (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003). Rassool further reiterates the view of the 'great man' character of South African state memorialisation in his argument that the heritage that is being added to the "landscape of memorialisation is that of biographic monuments to leaders, who are being recast as the bearers of democracy" (Interview Rassool, 2003).

What needs to inform these [memorials] is that they must interpret the mandate from an integrated value system that reflects the need on the ground, acknowledges the people on the ground [and that] the mass formed the history. (Interview Abrahams, 2002)

If memorials are [going] to be seen as simply ANC, excluding not just PAC, IFP, UDM but also excluding Indians, Whites and Coloureds, it's simply going to result in monuments which aren't used [or] aren't read. (Interview Thornton, 2002)

As outlined above, national memorial projects in its focus on nation building and reconstituting a national history, have, through the process of memorialisation systematically excluded certain groups and individuals who were significant in the struggle and who still remain central groupings within South African society. This inherent lack of group and individual representations through the memorialisation process has not only resulted in the alienation and further marginalisation of certain groups but also poses a threat to the reconciliation project and communal healing. According to Barton and McCully the past can be used to build and foster individual, group and national identity; provide moral examples in justifying the status quo; and empower marginalized groups in their struggle against the status quo or demand redress for past injustices. However, the past can also be 'abused' by the dominant group to serve present social and political purposes (Cairns and Roe, 2003). It is within this context, that state legacy projects, in its lack of attempting to understand and explain the past or empower people at a community level through representational memorialisation processes poses a threat to national reconciliation.

#### ***Engaging Civic Society - Consultation, Roles and Resources***

The problem is that when projects are initiated they [government] tell us they are meant for us, but eventually the whole thing changes and they are redirected ... without informing us. (Focus group Khulumani Cape Town, 2003)

I think that what happens is that key figures in communities are consulted and invariably [they are] those that are close to government, close to the ruling party

and therefore operate within a particular framework. I suspect that they are not getting many different ideas flowing from those consultations. (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003)

Those in power, positions of policy making ... must not be afraid of enabling the right to ask critical questions. Because to do so is enabling people to have access to the most powerful right in a democracy. (Interview Rassool, 2003)

The Draft Document of the National Legacy Project states with reference to the projects that the "importance of such an exercise is not to make these expressions of our national heritage and history become mere representations without engaging in debate and discussion about the differing experiences that comprise this history ([DACST, 2002](#)). As a prism through which we view the past, present and future, the power of memorials within a democratic society often lies in its ability to provoke civic debates, dialogues and discussions. This, in a post conflict society, can often occur as a result of the complexity of situations at a grassroots level where there is tensions between different groups, overlapping constituencies and opposing interpretations of events (Davison, 1998). To effectively and constructively allow communities to engage around such debates as well as activate the power of memorialisation as a vehicle for reconciliation, it is necessary that the consultation process be inclusive as well as representative. However, there was general agreement amongst government officials, individuals working in the field of public memory, as well as survivor groups that consultation processes were generally inadequate. The result of this lack is that national memorials do not represent the collective history of the nation, as all stories are not reflected in the memorials nor is there community buy-in and memorials (as in the case of the Thokoza Monument and the Trojan Horse Memorial) remain neglected. Nieftagodien argues that due narrow definition of memorialisation, that the scope of allowable ideas is limited, and often restricted by national political agendas (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003). Most survivor groups argued that they have never been consulted around issues of memorialisation and Khumbula noted that despite having submitted proposals for memorial projects to SAHRA as well as government departments, these proposals were rejected (Focus group Khulumani JHB, 2003; Khulumani Cape Town, 2003; Khumbula, 2003). Survivors, therefore felt that they had little power to engage government about its memorialisation agenda.

You have to go and say to people ... these are your options, these are the different approaches we can play [with], because people have not been involved in this kind of project its new [to them]. (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003)

But government's main role in this regard, in order for these to come into existence ... there needs to be training of this cadre of memory workers. (Interview Rassool, 2003)

We don't know much about museums and monuments and how to manage these things, so we would need some training and we can also bring our own things to the museum ... I think government should come to us and give us that little dignity to decide what we want and support us. (Focus group Khulumani Cape Town, 2003)

Another issue that was highlighted by scholars, survivors and people working within the

field of public memory, was that the consultation process should be linked to education and training around the processes of memorialisation so that communities could make informed decisions around their participation and needs. Survivors, scholars, certain government officials and people working within the field of public memory concurred that government should play a supportive role by providing information and resources, while communities who were not necessarily politically aligned, along with civil society organisations, should initiate as well as own projects. Furthermore, Thornton argues that broad consultation and information around national projects should take place through a comprehensive media outreach programme (Interview Thornton, 2002). Such a process will not only ensure that the voices of all South Africans are heard but will also ensure that civic engagement through ongoing debate and discussion will initiate the memorialisation process.

The funds that were allocated were never enough, especially to run a community project ... the funds that were provided were only for the building of the monument and not to make sure that there is continuity around the monument. (Interview Ramphele, 2003)

I think that national projects are important but that government should shift its resources more to supporting local initiatives. (Interview Nieftagodien, 2003)

If you look at the budget for Freedom Park, if you look at the budget for Constitution Hill, its ridiculous ... we're talking about the mismanagement of resources. (Interview Rassool, 2003)

I think that people in business ... should look deep in their hearts and dig deep in their pockets because really business was doing a lot of business at that time. (Focus group Khulumani, 2003).

Respondents working within the field of public memory as well as government officials argued about the disparity around the allocation of financial and human resources between community projects and legacy projects. The Legacy Projects as well resourced state-funded projects were seen as allocating resources to experts to "let them theme it and parachute out" (Interview Rassool, 2003), and in so doing further marginalizing communities' abilities to initiate and own projects. It was also noted by a government official that while government funded the actual building of community memorial facilities, <sup>5</sup> there was a lack of allocation of resources for sustainable programmes that could "turn memorials into a reality" (Interview government official, 2003). Solani argues that given government's limited resources, government should grant the initial funding for projects and through fund raising initiatives communities should endeavour to sustain projects (Interview Solani, 2002).

In acknowledging the limited resources of government, and the fact that reconciliation and development is in reality a responsibility of various sectors of the South African society, survivors, scholars and people working within the field of public memory argued that it was the moral obligation of business to contribute to memorialisation processes. This was viewed as a means of business meeting its moral obligation as benefactors of the Apartheid system as well as initiating a process of reconciliation between the business sector and communities. Legassick substantiated this view by saying that business should contribute to

reparations through a tax system that must be implemented by government (Interview Legassick, 2002).

## **Civil Society Initiatives**

### **Remembering Community: District Six Museum as a model of community empowerment**

In remembering we do not want  
To recreate District Six  
But to work with its memory:  
Of hurts inflicted and received,  
Of loss, achievements and shames.  
We wish to remember, so that we can all,  
Together and by ourselves,  
Rebuild a city  
Which belongs to all of us,  
In which all of us can live,  
Not as races but as people.

Le Grange argues that memory as a recollection of the past is often linked to urban places within the natural and built environments. Urban places, he argues, is the thread that binds people's experiences, with their sense of place and politics of space. He maintains that within the context of South African urban history and as a consequence of Apartheid policies, cities have begun to experience an erosion of public life and urban decay and consequently public memory is at a risk of extinction (Le Grange, 2001). In focussing on District Six as a city that continues to stimulate public memory, the District Six Museum has become a repository in which the displaced community of District Six organised their memories and sought to reclaim the land from which they were forcibly removed. As a means of social and community empowerment, the District Six Museum aimed at telling the stories of forced removals as well as using the "retrieval of memory as a resource of solidarity and reclamation" (Interview Rassool, 2003).

I think the District Six Museum is a good example because it has developed through consultation with ex-residents of District Six ... it's really a community-based museum and [has] had expert input from university trained people. But it [has] constantly developed itself ... through consultation with the community. (Interview Legassick, 2002)

And what the District Six Museum wants to offer is a methodology of work. It's not a romantic thing that says the people themselves will create their own projects. (Interview Rassool, 2003)

It's a particular method of working through the curatorial and research process with communities that address the methodological problems of appropriation of history by experts ... . People have to go through the process and it takes time. (Interview Rassool, 2003)

Since its inception, as an independent community based organisation in 1994, District Six Museum was not faced with the pressure of conforming to the nationalist agenda. However,

it still saw itself as nationally significant and contributing to the re-calling of South African history in its narrative around forced removals (Interview Rassool, 2003). In addressing the community of District Six, the initial concept of a museum was given birth to by a group of people (ex residents, political and cultural activists and academics) who aimed to use memory to convey the message of "never again." The museum was therefore seen as a place of memory that could be kept alive to tell the story of forced removals to descendants of the removed community (Fredericks, 2001).

... The museum all of a sudden finds itself in a situation where its residents are going to be returning ... they're going to be returning from townships ... from experiences of Apartheid ... concepts in the head that Apartheid gives you. (Interview Rassool, 2003)

Today as a major symbol of the victory of the District Six land claims, the museum has become a central feature of the Cape Town urban landscape. A continued work in progress, the District Six Museum is now faced with the challenge of returning residents who have not only been socialised by Apartheid but whose memories have been re-defined and mediated in terms of their experiences after their removals from District Six. To prepare for the "homecoming" the Museum is planning to develop a "District Six homecoming centre" that will engage with practical concerns but also attempt to work "people's consciousness." As it works through various themes around memory, the District Six Museum, as a people's museum is continually transforming and negotiating spaces of memory and "community reconstitution" (Rassool and Posalendis, 2001).

#### **Finding A Place of Memory – Khumbula's work on exhumations**

... The bulk of the applications for resources are for people who want reburials ... money for gravestones ... or to find human remains ... this is a huge aspect of the need to settle bodies and bones in the earth. For me the grave is the primary memorial and the desire for a grave speaks to this desire for a place of memory. (Interview Rassool, 2003)

In recognising the role of civil society in the process of reparations, the TRC final report acknowledges amongst various other organisations, the work of Khumbula. Khumbula was launched in 1998 as a non-governmental organisation that aimed to address the conditions of ex-combatants after the liberation struggle (TRC Report, 2003. 6,158). Driven by volunteers who themselves are ex-combatants and families of ex-combatants, Khumbula has limited funds to execute its work and relies mainly on funding from external governments of the countries within which they work (e.g. Lesotho government), families who seek their services and sometimes by the members themselves. In keeping with African traditions around being "reunited with the bones of the deceased," Khumbula's activities revolve mainly around investigating and trying to trace those people that 'disappeared' during the liberation struggle; exhumations of ex-combatants that died outside of the country; victim support services as well as assisting families to rebury the remains of the people that they lost.

Thus far Khumbula has conducted four exhumations and plans to work on future exhumations of exiles that are buried in Botswana and Zimbabwe. Khumbula has worked closely with local government authorities in reburying the remains. They believed that local

government authorities could not only play a significant role but also "give honour to those that have paid the ultimate sacrifice" (Interview Khumbula, 2003). As a result of its work and relationship with local government, Khumbula was allocated a piece of land in Paarl which was to be named the "Heroes Acre" that serves as a resting place for combatants that died in the liberation struggle.

Our artists should be making songs ... our actors should be making plays about it. We portrayed our liberation struggle ... it used the arts, it used all kinds of things and why can't we do the same thing in post-liberation [so that we can] give honour to and put our liberation struggle into proper perspective. (Focus group Khumbula, 2003)

In keeping with its passion that memorials should be "living memorials," Khumbula proposed a museum and amphitheatre that would include all victims and families, and that would complement the Heroes Acre in Paarl. However, with the change of local government authorities in the Western Cape, the organisation has been unable to gain approval or funds to initiate the project. Khumbula's work within the field of exhumations and reburials has however been recognised by SAHRA who has approached the organisation to co-ordinate a project around identification of graves in the Cape region. Despite its reputation around its work of exhumations and reburials, Khumbula does not receive any funding and experiences major challenges with regards to continuing its work. According to Christians the organisation's major challenge is the lack of skills and capacity within the organisation (Interview Christians, 2003). While there has been one successful initiative, with the admittance of an ex-combatant into the Recognition of Prior Learning Programme at the University of Western Cape, the organisation still remains greatly in need of financial management training, fundraising and general capacity building to ensure the sustainability of the organisation as well as ongoing work within the field of exhumations and reburials (Interview Christians, 2003).

What we have identified is that around issues of memorials we need to include families ... they were never given real recognition for the roles that their family members played in the struggle. (Focus group Khumbula, 2003)

... This is inherent in our African culture. You know the linkage between the ancestry and the living should at all times be maintained ... and it goes across all religions basically. (Focus group Khumbula, 2003)

Apart from that, what about the disappeared ... that is unfinished business and a chapter on its own ... we are talking about families reconciling, but who do they reconcile with. (Focus group Khumbula, 2003)

Kgalema, in his investigation around community monuments in South Africa, highlights the significance of African ritual practices around death. He argues that it is the norm to visit the graves of the dead and communicate one's problems with the dead as they are considered ancestors who possess powers over the living. It is also believed that if a person dies as a result of human intervention then the person's soul is not at rest, even if they are buried. A special ceremony is conducted at the spot where the person died and then proceeds to the home of the dead. This process both recognises the dead as well as puts the spirit at rest (Kgalema, 1999). Similarly, memorialisation, especially in the work of

Khumbula acknowledges the role that was played by the dead. Furthermore, such processes provide a certain degree of emotional compensation for the family of the dead as their family role is acknowledged, and the family is once again symbolically reunited with the loved ones that they lost (Kgalema, 1999). While Khumbula's work is driven by the passion to serve the needs of the families of victims and ex-combatants themselves in terms of healing and closure, the organisation is continually under threat of extinction as a result of lack of financial support and overall capacity.

## **Conclusions**

... People think that the TRC was a mechanism to achieve reconciliation ... that wasn't the task of the TRC. The task of the TRC was to create the story of reconciliation and develop this body of evidence about the story. The one that will be told as reconciliation and to give that story of reconciliation authenticity [will be] emerging from all these stories from so many different places all around the country. (Interview Rassool, 2003)

In many ways the TRC was successful in this endeavour – it has produced a framework within which reconciliation can be pursued. In focussing on the role of memorialisation as a form of symbolic reparations, it is evident that memorialisation can be successful and does have potential to affect processes of reconciliation, healing and civic engagement within a country that is still challenged by the remnants of the Apartheid regime. This report has aimed to preliminarily discuss the various types of initiatives around memorialisation and it is within this process that the various ruptures within the process of memorialisation have been identified. The recommendations outlined below are therefore guiding mechanisms that if implemented, can allow for memorialisation processes to achieve their true potential as vehicles through which peace, justice and reconciliation can be pursued.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Memorialisation as a form of symbolic reparations***

- Memorialisation as a form of symbolic reparations should be dealt with in a sustained and fundamental way. It should be a part of a holistic, complementary reparations strategy that includes all forms of reparations outlined in the TRC report.
- At present memorialisation projects reside within the Department of Arts and Culture and stakeholders include representatives from the Departments of, Education, Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Public Works, Constitutional Development, President's Office and the National Monuments Council. These projects are viewed mainly as heritage projects. For memorialisation to become an effective means of symbolic reparations in the process of transitional justice, memorialisation should be identified as symbolic reparations specifically.
- Clear policy guidelines should be outlined for memorialisation to fulfil its potential as a form of symbolic reparations.

### ***Community Empowerment***

- The approach to memorialisation should be community and people driven rather

than politics driven.

- Government should support communities and civil society to initiate projects.
- To ensure that communities are able to initiate projects and effectively articulate their needs, information and education programmes around memorialisation should precede all projects. This will also empower communities to constructively engage in issues around memory as well as facilitate processes of community reconciliation
- To ensure that memorial projects facilitate sustained economic empowerment of the community as well as community ownership, memorial management, fundraising, tourism and other skills and training should be offered as part of the process.
- The community, with advice and support from 'experts,' should lead the curation and creation of memorial spaces.

### *Consultations*

- Consultation processes should be aimed at ensuring broad participation of all stakeholders and should focus on the range of needs that are a part of the memorialisation process. This would include content needs, infrastructure needs, sustainability needs etc.
- Consultation should occur in a transparent and honest manner. All stakeholders of the community should be invited to actively and constructively participate in the consultation process.
- To effect national reconciliation, consultation for legacy projects should occur at a national level but also be inclusive of a range of different stakeholders.
- Specific efforts should be made to ensure that the voices of marginalized groupings such as youth, women, veterans, ex-combatants etc. are heard within both local and national level processes.

### *Content*

- The state needs to shift its political focus around memorialisation in its honouring of great men and events. More sensitivity needs to be given to gender, race, class and cultural representations of history.
- There has been a tendency to use external, Western consultants to theme legacy projects. As Troy Philli argues, memorialisation around the world has "taken a holocaust identity." He argued that the challenge was for "South Africa ... to come up with memorialisation that has an African identity" (Interview Philli, 2003). To ensure that memorial sites and its content are culturally acceptable and representative, it is recommended that a core, representative group of South Africans be trained in processes of public memory to effectively assist in national and community processes of memorialisation.
- Memorial sites should be conceptualised as living sites of heritage, education and memory.

### *Resources*

- The disparity between the resources allocated to legacy projects and community-base projects should be addressed. Budgets need to either be re-aligned to favour community projects or legacy projects need to increase the roles of communities within these projects.



- Resources should be allocated for both the building of infrastructure as well as seed funding for start - up programmes around the memorialisation sites.
- The state should support present memorialisation initiatives that are undertaken by NGO's and CBO's either through financial support or skills development and capacity building. This 'informal partnership' will ensure a process in which civil society will assist government in bridging the gap between community and national programmes as well as inform government's memorialisation processes through a bottom–up approach.
- To ensure that working class, Black South Africans benefit from memorialisation projects, local labour and skills must be utilised.
- Business should be urged, through government, to support memorialisation processes through its social responsibility programmes.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The President referred to academic and informal records of history, the remaking of cultural and art forms, erecting symbols and monuments that reflect the struggle for freedom and new geographic and place names as systematic programmes around symbolism.

<sup>2</sup> Rassool argues that the main focus around reparations has been debates and discussions around government's inability to deliver financial compensation to victims, however, very little discussion has happened around government's lack of implementation around symbolic reparations proposals (Rassool et. al.2000).

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Biko's argument was exemplified by Dr. Alex Boraine's statement that people who thought that the TRC was a cash cow were mistaken.

<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon of memorialising events and heroes in the South African liberation struggle is not limited to national government projects. Local and provincial governments are responsible for initiating community memorialisation projects, however, as in the case of Sharpeville and the Alexandra projects, focus is still being given to heroes and events (albeit in more creative ways). Scholars and those working within the field of public memory viewed this as a result of memorial sites being linked to economic and tourist 'spin offs' where sites are focused more on meeting the needs of the foreign visitor rather than that of the community.

<sup>5</sup> This specifically refers to the Sharpeville Memorial Monument.

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## **Interviewees**

Bea Abrahams. (11 December 2002). Africa Manager, Centre for the Study of Violence and

Reconciliation. One on one interview. Conducted by Oupa Makhalemele.

Ciraj Rassool. (30 May 2003). Lecturer, History Department University of Western Cape. One on one interview. Conducted by author.

F. Hoosen. (26 May 2003). Administrator of Presidential Fund, National Department of Justice. Telephonic interview. Conducted by author.

Gawie Greef. (26 May 2003). Urban Designer, Sharpeville Monument Memorial. One on one interview. Conducted by author.

Gustav Tselapedi. (23 May 2003). Assistant Director, Gauteng Department of Sport Recreation Arts and Culture. One on one interview. Conducted by author.

Maphata Rampele. (23 May 2003). Principal Cultural Officer, Gauteng Department of Sport Recreation Arts and Culture. One on one interview. Conducted by author.

Martin Legassick. (14 February 2002). Professor, SADET Project. One on one interview. Conducted by Oupa Makhalemele.

Nkosinathi Biko. (11 January 2002). Chairperson, Steve Biko Foundation. One on one interview. Conducted by Oupa Makhalemele.

Noel Solani. (15 February 2002). Researcher, Robben Island Museum. One on one interview. Conducted by Oupa Makhalemele.

Noor Nieftagodien. (21 May 2003). Researcher, Wits History Project. One on one interview. Conducted by author.

Robert Thornton. (09 January 2002). Professor, Wits Anthropology Department. One on one interview. Conducted by Oupa Makhalemele.

Sello Mathabathe. (25 April 2003). Researcher, Wits History Workshop. One on one interview. Conducted by Oupa Makhalemele.

Shirley Gunn. (29 May 2003). Human Rights Media Centre. Discussion. With author.

Sifiso Ndlovu. (25 June 2002). SADET Project. One on one interview. Conducted by Oupa Makhalemele.

Troy Phili. (22 May 2003). Cultural Officer, South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA). One on one interview. Conducted by author.

### **Focus Groups**

Khulumani Cape Town. (29 May 2003). Focus group. Conducted by author.

Khulumani Johannesburg. (20 May 2003). Focus group. Conducted by author.

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