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The Role of Memory Work in Building Social Cohesion

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In this paper, I raise the possibility of developing a focused initiative which uses the tools of memory work to promote greater individual self-esteem and social cohesion as an important component of a comprehensive strategy to eradicate poverty. Local government is proposed as the coordinating agent and driver of such efforts, but drawing on partnerships with both the private and civil society sectors. Examples are given from the experiences of the Makana Municipality which is currently running a year-long project commemorating the 200 years since Grahamstown was founded in 1812.

In recent times, the call for a more effective way of tackling the still-heavy legacy of the apartheid past has been made on many fronts. This conference is convened in response to the call made by President Zuma for national dialogues. The ANC's debates over the Second Transition or Second Phase at least agree on the need for renewed vigour and energy in finding ways to think and act differently than we have as a nation so far. July's Social Cohesion Summit saw all sectors of society concurring with a similar sentiment. Mamphele Ramphele, in April, launched a Citizen Movement for Social Change. These discussions share in common a strong sense that we need 'something more' if we are to move ahead. As never before, there is a sense of being stuck in the effort to build a completely different and better kind of society in South Africa.

The call for more meaningful dialogue is everywhere. The need to release people from a deeply-ingrained sense of victimhood and low self-esteem on the one hand and casual detachment from social inequalities on the other, is widely recognised, as is the need to promote dialogues which transcend traditional boundaries between people and sectors of society. The hoped-for outcomes of such dialogues range from 'active citizenship' to profound shifts in thinking entailed in forming a 'social compact' between government, labour, the private sector and civil society.¹ Greater levels of a shared sense of belonging and active

¹ *IKE E: /XARRA //KE: Creating A Caring And Proud Society, a National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and a Cohesive South African Society*, Department of Arts and Culture, 7 June 2012; Thandika Mkandawire, "Building the African state in the age of globalisation: the role of social compacts and lessons for South Africa" Inaugural Annual Lecture, March 2012, Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection.

participation are seen as an essential ingredient in moving the nation towards fulfilling its full potential of 'a better life for all.' All participants in thinking about these things concur that the 'soft' or attitudinal side of things alone cannot eradicate poverty, but that it is unlikely poverty will go away without a different quality of thinking. Social cohesion is becoming ever-more widely understood as the cement which holds the bricks of society together.

The high cost of the absence of social cohesion has never been tabulated, but the evidence is abundant. Without a common moral and ethical base guiding the conduct of the average citizen, government is forced to turn more and more frequently to coercive measures to bring conduct into line. In the local government sphere, the escalating costs of policing public assets and trying to secure compliance with laws and by-laws is a worrying concern. New funds have to be found on an almost daily basis for surveillance cameras to monitor public buildings and streets, hiring more 'peace officers' to enforce by-laws on issues such as illegal dumping, noise and littering, building caretakers cottages at every municipal building to try to deter vandalism, mounting patrols of commonages to prevent theft of fencing, and hiring fresh teams of building inspectors to ensure that well-paid contractors actually do the work they have been hired to do without cheating on the quality of building materials. All these challenges could be described as the result of 'social erosion' – the ever-declining values of society. Such costs eat heavily into funds that could be better spent on much-needed infrastructural maintenance and improvements. In 2007 the ANC issued a document called 'The RDP of the Soul' following on its launch in 2002 of the Moral Regeneration Movement as efforts to curb the declining standards of social cohesion. The concerns are not new, but may be growing.

The Legacy of the TRC

With unprecedented levels of agreement on the need for more effective dialogues, just how are these supposed to happen and around what issues? Who should be talking to whom? How will dialogues help? South Africa has already experienced the profound impact of a major dialogue in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.² It is generally lauded as having set the tone of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation in the critical years of the nation's transition out of apartheid into democracy. As former president Nelson Mandela put it, 'Only by knowing the truth can we hope to heal the terrible wounds of the past that are the legacy of

² The Truth and Reconciliation Commission worked from 1995 through 1998, taking 21,298 written statements on 37,672 human rights violations and conducted interviews with 2,200 people in public forums. Sean Field, 'Beyond "Healing": Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration', *Oral History*, Spring 2006

apartheid. Only the truth can put the past to rest.’³ By listening to the personal stories of thousands of people, both victims and perpetrators, it became the largest memory work project ever undertaken in South Africa.

The very act of allowing people to tell their stories carries with it many valuable and healing benefits. Not only did the TRC generate a massive historical record of what happened, but also enabled multiple forms of recovery through its processes. For individuals, the value of being able to testify to the TRC has several facets. First, those who testified felt surrounded and comforted by the fact that there was an audience to listen. This meant that their suffering in the past was acknowledged and recognised, no longer a burden they had to carry in private. Secondly, they received active support and sympathy for their pains. Thirdly, the whole process affirmed their basic human rights, as well as made people feel they were contributing to building a new and fairer social order in South Africa. Fourthly, their stories formed part of the construction of new standards of justice.

Telling personal stories and ‘confessing’ to previously untold hardships or atrocious deeds had the positive effect of naming, then releasing the emotive force of gross injustices. By so doing, the bad deeds of the past were implicitly placed in the context of a new commitment to human rights. Confessions were seen as ‘redeeming the humanity of both victim and perpetrator,’ allowing both to be received back into a wiser, gentler community of the future through ‘journeys of wholeness’.⁴ The act of ‘telling the truth’ was viewed as part and parcel of laying the foundation of a new moral order. Providing a place and time for black and white to sit and talk honestly and frankly to each other about difficult things was a genuine breakthrough in the South African collective experience. The moral bankruptcy of the apartheid policies were exposed and replaced by far more inclusive humanitarian values.

However, over time, several shortcomings and limitations to the TRC have been noted. For one, ‘reconciliation’ was expected and virtually prescribed in the way the hearings were conducted, even if the witnesses did not feel spontaneously inclined to forgive those who had deprived them of their loved ones or caused serious personal injury. As Gillian Slovo, the daughter of Ruth First and Joe Slovo, put it, the TRC became like a ‘mass singing of the blues’ – more of a heartfelt lament than anything else.⁵ She felt that the victims were asked to make the greatest

³ Quoted in Field, 32.

⁴ Deborah Posel, ‘History as Confession : the Case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ *Public Culture*, 20:1 2008, 130, 139.

⁵ Gillian Slovo, ‘Revealing is Healing’, *New Humanist*, Vol. 118, Issue 1, Spring 2003.

sacrifice, by giving up their right to seek legal redress against the perpetrators, as was written into the terms of reference of the TRC.

Perhaps most significant about the nature of the work of the TRC for our current debates, is the fact that it only dealt with the most heinous *atrocities* of the apartheid system. Virtually all of the perpetrators who testified were junior level government employees who could claim they were simply following orders. Those who gave the orders were never brought to account. The result of this approach has been said to make the whole nation feel it had been victimised by a handful of bad people.⁶ This effectively let all white people and major beneficiaries of apartheid off the hook, pardoned from facing up to any sense of responsibility for what had happened.

Direct discussions of *race* were strongly discouraged by the TRC. Today it is clearly felt that while racially-defined laws and institutions have been changed, racism is still manifest in a myriad of ways, leaving people with a sense of frustration, if not down-right despair, that things are scarcely changing. Black people experience many kinds of 'new racism', including a special kind of double talk and the expectation that they will assimilate into whiteness.⁷ With the narrow focus of the TRC on the worst cases, the vast majority of the nation was left out and even made to feel that the hardships and indignities that they also suffered did not count, by comparison. The mood of the nation was reconciliation and moving on, with no space created for other forms of mass popular participation in such exercises. Valji describes this as 'a premature celebration of reconciliation.'⁸ As the TRC was winding down its work, some observers recommended that similar processes should be repeated in schools, churches, companies and private institutions.⁹ With only a few exceptions, however, this never happened.

Instead of seeing anything resembling 'justice' extracted from those who enjoyed the benefits of the vicious exploitation of others under apartheid, the masses were told that justice would

⁶ Nahla Valji, 'Race and Reconciliation in a Post-TRC South Africa', Paper Presented at a conference , *Ten Years of Democracy in Southern Africa*. Organised by Southern African Research Centre, Queens University, Canada, May 2004. Published by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

⁷ Xoliswa Mtose, 'Black Peoples' Lived Experiences of Everyday Racism in Post-apartheid South Africa', *The Journal of International Social Research*, Vol. 4, Issue 17, Spring 2011, 329.

⁸ Valji, 7.

⁹ Annelies Verdoolaege, 'Dealing with a traumatic past: the victim hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their reconciliation discourse', *Critical Discourse Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4, November 2009, 306. The exceptions noted by the author were a programme at the Wits University Faculty of Health Sciences and in the Khulumani Support Group.

lie in the material benefits they could expect from the democratic government.¹⁰ Today we can see how this has contributed heavily to a situation in which expectations of the government to deliver everything that is needed in life have run far ahead of what is realistic. It also induced an element of passivity, of waiting to be serviced, without concomitant participation or shared responsibility for re-building the nation.

Perhaps, most of all, it left untouched, what hurt most about apartheid, which was the assumption of white superiority which permeated all things. The legacy of low self-esteem among those who were denigrated by the racial order can never be measured. But it certainly contributes to today's indulgences in consumerism, where display of 'things' such as clothes, cars, posh houses, etc. is taken as an indicator of one's self-worth. The culture of low self-esteem produces a climate of fear, insecurity, ferocious competition with others, escapist behaviour such as alcoholism and drug abuse, clinging to narrow definitions of one's own kind for ethnic security, as well as exercising force over others in order to 'prove' one's power.

The value system of unbridled personal accumulation was never seriously challenged and the rich were never asked to do anything more than accept the change in government. Today, the story is often told of how the South African corporate sector is sitting on half a trillion Rands of unspent cash, which they refuse to invest in job-creating enterprises in South Africa. The government, instead, does all in its power to woo foreign investors. Rather than tackle systemic problems, the rich leave the country for greener pastures due to their objections to Affirmative Action and concerns over high crime rates.¹¹ This indicates a failure to see the relationship between the past exploitative system and the justification for forms of redress. At no time have they ever been encouraged to feel pride and satisfaction in 'giving back.'

The language of 'reconciliation' should be understood as what was appropriate and necessary for the first phase of the transition out of apartheid. It carried the nation over the threshold into peaceful co-existence of widely differing sectors of the population. But the work of undoing the three hundred years of humiliation, since the beginning of colonial conquests, still needs to be done. If social cohesion is to be attained, *healing* at a personal level needs to take place in the second phase. The high price of not doing so is becoming increasingly evident.

¹⁰ Sarah Ruden, 'A Common what? The limits of reconciliation', *The New Criterion*, November 2008.

¹¹ Valji, 5.

What is Memory Work?

The memory work sector -- which includes a range of heritage-related practices and institutions -- has long defined itself as offering a form of 'social healing.' This bears many similarities to personal healing, but is done in public spaces and emphasises collective efforts to recover from painful shared experiences of the past. The point and purpose of memory work is to excavate hidden truths and give them new forms of relevance and meaning. In particular, the acknowledgment of pain, injustice, suffering and cruel belief systems is seen as part of a process of releasing their hold over peoples' lives and self-images. Facing them directly provides the first step towards moving on and pursuing a different kind of future. There are a variety of ways that this objective can be pursued.

Perhaps the easiest and most gratifying is work in 'oral history'. Carefully planned interviews, which are recorded and then developed into some form of shared information outputs are the core activities. Sean Field believes that it is the act of putting information gained from oral histories into projects that consolidates its value.¹² When community-based projects are implemented, the information that is provided in a personal interview becomes public knowledge, but is mediated by the interests and needs of the community itself. Neighbours share with each other and construct their own meanings. This stands in contrast to the academic practice of having an 'expert' come and collect information which is then removed and used for purposes that might be alien to the informant. An oral history interview is also generally kinder and more supportive than the interviews that were conducted by the TRC, where the Commissioners cross-examined informants in a semi-legal setting in which they aimed to compile well-vetted, factual records. However, the benefits of telling one's stories in a safe and supportive space would be similar to those of the TRC.

The success of the Chief Albert Luthuli Oral History Competition, run by the Department of Basic Education, stands as a good example of what can be done. Teachers receive basic training in the skills of oral history collecting, which they in turn pass on to their learners, who in turn conduct interviews with community members on any project of their choice. Finished projects are then taken to competitions at provincial and national levels until a national winner is chosen. Having sat on the adjudication panel of this competition for a few years, I can attest to the fact that indeed, the young peoples' work lives up to every hope and expectation that they will learn from their elders, while bringing to the surface important hidden stories and lessons. The classic refrain of the oral history sector is that it is ideally designed to 'give voice to the voiceless' as in its public form, it generally goes beyond the rich and the famous to seek out the everyday heroes and heroines who might have been overlooked by other forms of media and

¹² Field, 40.

research. We have an Oral History Association of South Africa which provides guidance on codes of conduct and standards, ensuring that work is always done within a fully ethical framework.

Museums and other exhibition spaces offer a different kind of learning opportunity for members of the public. An exhibition provides a deeply-concentrated body of information, not only in words and texts, but by using vivid and exciting visual material, often enhanced by artistic lighting and settings. It is a very carefully-structured space which one must visit to fully appreciate. The emphasis is often on creating an emotive 'experience' of some aspect of the past. The visitor becomes deeply immersed in the message, which often makes a lasting emotional impact. Who could ever forget the horrors of death row after visiting the Apartheid Museum's exhibition which consists of dozens of nooses hanging from the ceiling? People have to go to exhibitions, entailing a commitment of time and effort. They are not readily available to everybody, unless they become travelling exhibitions, as many do.



Figure 1 Nooses at Apartheid Museum

Memorials and public art are constructions that transform shared public spaces, altering the landscape in some way. They generally involve the creation of a special structure, which could range from something as simple as a pile of stones to a creative sculpture to a small building. Their greatest value comes when they represent something that is highly meaningful in the life of a community and stand as a permanent reminder of the message or theme. By its nature, a memorial is about remembering something from the past. Public art is closely related, taking the form of sculptures, murals or paintings of all sizes and shapes, but is more likely to represent an abstract feeling or sentiment, not bound by a specific person or event.

Some of the world's most famous memorials were designed to help whole nations heal from traumatic pasts. The Viet Nam War Memorial in Washington DC is a stark, long, but graceful wall inscribed with all the names of the people who died fighting for the US in the war. It has become the most visited tourist attraction in the nation. Similarly, the Hiroshima Peace Park is designed to transform the memory of the horrors of the atomic bomb into a quest for finding world peace. It consists of both a tranquil garden for quiet, individual remembering, as well as a

conference centre dedicated to peace studies. Memorials to those who died in the Holocaust abound in number and take many different forms.

Community involvement in designing memorials allows for debates and discussions about what matters most and what needs to be represented. In Monrovia, Liberia, Duport Road community members enlisted the services of a local artist to design a memorial they wanted to have built.¹³ During the Liberian civil war, this community had been terrorised by a factional night raid that left nearly 300 residents dead, mostly killed in their homes where they were sleeping. A mass grave at the edge of the community was the only way to accommodate so many bodies under wartime conditions. The sequence of the artists' sketches capture the evolution of the feelings of the survivors about what had happened and what it meant. The first sketch depicts the raw horror of the piles of skeletal remains. The second still maintains a sense of horror, using skull images, but tones it down with symbolic rather than literal representations, while the third one captures a sense of hope, with a family huddled together, alert to danger, as a top structure over an exhibition of the details of the massacre, to be placed underground, like the bones and the memories. The images show a profound deepening of peoples' sense of what mattered most, ending with the loving strength of the family, rather than remaining in the acute pain of the loss.



Figure 2 Duport Memorial Road sketches, 1 - 3

¹³ Information obtained from 'We want to be involved' Oral history for Liberia training of trainers workshop, 9-10 June 2011, Monrovia, Liberia, International Committee for Transitional Justice Conference Hall, J Wells, facilitator.

The world of computers, the internet, digital cameras, digital audio recorders, scanners, social networks, etc. opens up memory work functions and activities to everyone on an individual level, but can also be easily and inexpensively harnessed for community work. At relatively little expense, small projects can produce their own exhibitions, wall plaques, blog sites, booklets, flyers and brochures. It has never been easier to gather information, package it nicely and share it with others. Professionally-run web-sites, such as South African History Online provide a wealth of information which can support small-scale projects done by individuals or communities.

Special events, speeches, discussion sessions, community meetings, presentations, dramatic productions among others can all be used as occasions to provide and share information about the past including both collective and individual experiences. They may be either quite simple and inexpensive or massive galas, providing food, transportation and entertainment for participants.

Performing and visual arts also offer an opportunity for memory work. Not only do these forms of expression allow for widespread participation, especially by youth, but they also play a powerful role in building positive values and self-esteem. It is estimated that a person who participates in artistic activities is four times more likely to be a leader in his or her community than one who doesn't.¹⁴ Artistic expression trains people to think in universal terms and shared values and to communicate deeply-felt messages, while opening up creative capacities which might otherwise lie untapped.

Though these are not the only forms of memory work, they stand out as illustrations of some of the kinds of targets that can be aimed for. In order to serve the needs of healing South African society, any memory work initiative should make widespread participation its main goal, both to maximise the inflow of information, as well as to ensure a sense of community ownership and benefit. This requires a clear prioritisation of involvement at the grass roots level, and so marks a significant departure from the mega-heritage projects sponsored by government in the early years of democracy.¹⁵

¹⁴ 'Reframing the Debate about the Value of the Arts', *Research Brief*, Rand Research in the Arts, 2005.

¹⁵ Such projects include the Women's Monument, Chief Albert Luthuli's house, Battle of Blood River/Ncome Project, Samora Machel Project, Nelson Mandela Museum, Constitution Hill Project, The Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance, The Freedom Park Project, The Dulcie September Legacy Project, The 2010 FIFA World Cup™ legacy projects.

What role can Local Government Play?

Though Local Government has no special expertise in the field of memory work, it has several other assets to offer. It plays a pivotal role in bringing together disparate sectors of local communities and is already familiar with forming partnerships through structured agreements with a host of community organisations and service providers. It has sufficient authority to call together representatives of the business sector, the NGO sector, government departments and faith leaders to participate in activities. Strategic planning is a familiar task, where outcomes are not presumed, but elicited from stakeholders. A strong regulated framework for financial management exists and municipalities have experience in serving as the accounting entity for projects with multiple partners. Once a project becomes part of a Municipality's Integrated Development Plan, it is subject to monthly reports and relevant staff members are held accountable for its completion. Further, Local Government owns and operates community halls, libraries and recreational fields, which easily lend themselves to all sorts of events and programmes.

Perhaps most importantly for securing participation, local government runs on networks of Ward Councillors, Ward Committees and Community Development Workers, providing a ready channel for information to the wider community. Publicity through local media for events and programmes is also easy to organise through Municipal communication channels.

The knowledge of how to do memory work is something that comes from the NGO or civil society sector. Museum professionals, university academics and heritage entities can provide hands-on knowledge and training. NGO's, foundations and small specialised companies often have experience in running a variety of types of programmes which require community involvement. As such, they all offer a pool of skilled service providers which can be enlisted as vital partners. Such organisations often have their own basic resources, such as offices and computers, keeping the task of running a project straight-forward and simple. Memory work is essentially knowledge-based, so does not need massive investments in physical resources.

The education sphere can also play a big role in providing tasks and assignments for learners, giving them some form of incentive and reward for being involved in memory work. It easily integrates into school projects. Similarly, the private sector should be willing to play a supportive role in offering finances for constructive community-building activities. It can also provide skills training, internships and jobs for people who have come through community-based programmes.

Experiences from the 200 Year Project in Makana Municipality

The approach of the Makana Municipality to the 200 year anniversary of the founding of Grahamstown was to try to promote community-driven projects, with a view to getting people to tell stories about aspects of local history that had not been previously recorded and thus correct imbalances. The approach is to have events run throughout the entire calendar year of 2012, under the theme 'Reflect and Imagine'. The point was not to focus on the founding event so much as to use the anniversary as a reason for community-building initiatives.

From the beginning the project faced controversy since the establishment of Grahamstown 200 years ago came as the result of war and British conquest of the region. Many people questioned whether to even note the event was not in some way 'celebrating' the Xhosa loss of land and freedom. The municipality's calls to construct a new and inclusive history around 'what has been achieved over 200 years' have, therefore, met with a mixed response.



Figure 3 Logo of Makana Municipality 200 Years Project

When the municipality sponsored a parade and street festival to launch the project, many groups withdrew their participation at the last minute on the grounds that it was politically incorrect to 'celebrate' conquest. The events went ahead but were somewhat scaled down. The unwillingness to speak about other positive achievements sent a signal that a view of the past firmly grounded in the injustices ran very deep in some quarters. The call to come forward and tell stories about personal triumphs in everyday life elicited no spontaneous response. The prevailing culture of 'negative commemorations' appeared to carry more weight than telling stories of personal achievements and re-writing imbalanced histories.¹⁶

The project, however, received healthy responses to a call for proposals for community organisations to design and run their own projects. In total, 14 different projects are receiving funding. Most are once-off events run by NGO's and semi-professional performance groups. They include street theatre, schools performances, youth collecting profiles of notable people, hip-hop and other performance competitions, teaching traditional Xhosa environmental best practice, a wellness day, career guidance from scattered professional sons and daughters of the

¹⁶ Posel , 123. The shift to commemorating bad things that happened in the past started after the second world war. 'Indeed, the politics of negative commemoration is inseparable from a politics of victimhood and the 'victim consciousness' attached to it. Being declared, and claiming the status of, a victim is also a positioning in contemporary political fields of rights and entitlements, obligations and responsibilities.'

oldest black school and a major Youth Day programme including 22 primary schools. The local media gives ready coverage to these events and also has commissioned local history articles from retired academics. Virtually every issue of the local newspaper, *Grocott's Mail*, has articles or Municipal adverts bearing the 200 Years Project logo. By mid-2012, it could be confidently stated that the brand is familiar and recognisable. The decision to *not* direct the 200 Years Project as a top-down initiative from the municipality paid off well by opening space for local initiative and creativity.

The 200 year anniversary was also quite visible in this year's National Arts Festival. A regional newspaper, *The Herald*, from Port Elizabeth ran a series of articles about Grahamstown's past as part of its Festival promotion. At the Festival itself, the *Think!Fest* series of lectures featured many speakers on diverse topics about the local past, and the innovative *Polis* programme creatively combined aspects of audience-participation drama and lectures around Grahamstown themes. The launches of new Museum exhibitions are targeted for Heritage Day in September. These are all activities outside of any kind of Municipal funding or programming.

A second leg of the Municipal project included taking on four unemployed university graduates as interns under the guidance of the Albany Museum. Their task is to collect local history information for posting on a blog site and to be available to help communities develop their own mini-histories. In their initial efforts, they found that most people viewed any project coming from the Municipality as one that should be offering some form of material benefits. The point of talking about themselves and their pasts was not easy to communicate. However, the interns persisted and developed clear strategies of doing well thought-out networking and of consistently getting their stories published in the local newspaper as on-going examples of what kinds of outcomes can be expected.

Due to the challenges faced in getting community participation, the Municipality changed its tactics for the second half of the year, shifting to flexibly-framed ward-based initiatives. It is now asking each ward committee to identify one school, one church and one sports or recreational organisation to develop their own mini-histories. The Museum interns are on hand to assist with information-gathering and packaging. Each ward is also asked to participate in an intensive place-naming exercise, identifying streets without names, streets with offensive names, other public spaces with meaningless names (such as A Street, B Street, Extension 5, etc.) and to come up with names of local community heroes and heroines to be used. Finally, each ward is asked to identify one open space for the construction of a traditional Xhosa circular fireplace for story-telling. These initiatives are now underway. A DVD is to be produced to capture highlights of all the 200 Year Project activities so they can be more widely known outside of the communities where they took place. Before the commemorative year is out, it is hoped that clearly focused community dialogues will be started, as well as a panel presentation

on fresh understandings of local history from academics and then to end the year with an exercise for visioning the future and possibly some form of reconciliation ceremonies.

Clearly one of the important lessons from the Makana experience is that people are unlikely to understand the nature of a memory-work type of project. The notion that communities can 'write their own histories' is unfamiliar. Expectations that local government will simply do everything in a top-down manner run high. Doing meaningful memory work should be understood as a *process* which moves from the more simple to the more complex. Lack of understanding of what it was about at the outset had to be gradually addressed through constructive activities which clearly demonstrated the full potential of memory work.

Therefore, the pursuit of any such project should be packaged carefully, starting with some clear and concrete examples of how it works and what it means. The overall awareness that activities of this nature are part of a self-conscious thrust towards community-building and instilling pride needs to be clearly communicated. How such efforts relate and compare to other aspects of poverty alleviation should also be addressed. The robust and energetic response from civil society organisations to the call for proposals confirms that this sector has enormous potential to be the actual implementers of memory work programmes. They help shift the focus away from government dependency into realms of personal satisfaction, enjoyment and leisure.

Trying to Measure Social Cohesion

Something as intangible as social cohesion can never be scientifically measured. However, it should be possible to look at some relevant indicators to assess whether an in-depth project using memory work is having any impact. The assumption is that by getting people to talk about themselves, their pasts and their achievements, they would feel more positive about themselves and a greater sense of awareness and identification with a local community could be achieved. Just as there are efforts to measure the effects of participation in music, arts and drama programmes on people, similar methodologies might be applied to areas where serious memory work is undertaken. Good indicators of improvements in social cohesion could include things such as crime rates, school drop out rates, levels of pursuit of further studies, an assessment of home-improvements and participation in voluntary associations. All of these would be indicative of forward movement in the health of communities. However, it would be necessary to also be aware of possible external factors which make an impact on any local context, such as natural disasters, major loss of employment opportunities, major influxes or outflows of population, etc. Such studies could be undertaken by social science departments at

institutions of higher education. Unfortunately, no such effort was made in relation to the Grahamstown 200 Years Project, due to lack of time and financial resources.

Getting the most from memory work

Experience has shown that care should be taken to avoid pitfalls. When looking at a past as conflicted as South Africa's, people should not be taken through exercises that will end up re-traumatising them. It serves no positive purpose if they feel only reminders of pain, without something that helps recover from it. In the Grahamstown case, the belief that the 200 Year Project was about celebrating defeat made it hard for people to participate in the more positive aspect of highlighting community and personal achievements. It required a direct intervention of offering a ward-specific framework, with trained helpers, to nudge many communities into telling the stories of their notable schools, churches and sporting groups. It was necessary to demonstrate the potential and possibilities of memory work before it could be readily understood. The anniversary provided a plausible reason for doing this kind of work.

If maximum value is to be obtained in building social cohesion, it needs to be talked about directly as projects are underway. A framework and vocabulary about feeling better and stronger, overcoming injuries and obstacles needs to be an integral part of any effort. The same applies to using sporting activities to build youth and communities. Sport can simply be played, or it can be done with a focused effort to speak about how character is being built and how basic life-skills and attitudes are being nurtured. Habits and attitudes which contribute to the absence of social cohesion should be spoken about directly and tackled head-on. These include tolerance of crime, vandalism, self-interested competition, back-stabbing of others, casual work attitudes, alcoholism and indifference to hardships of others.

An important aspect of the model is to ensure that the active participation of as many people as possible is viewed as a top priority. It is not about experts producing a beautiful package of information to be consumed by others, but rather about people producing knowledge and meanings for themselves that touch their lives deeply. The tendency of government to organise big events for people has to be replaced by a sense of how low-key, but ongoing participation is the formula for success. Top-down effort might be expected from people, but it will kill participation and enthusiasm. A careful balance between showing what it is about and leaving space for people to bring their own insights and information should remain the target.

When doing memory work, it is also important to be mindful of how the different generations experience their lives. The younger generation is much freer from the emotional baggage of the apartheid era and should in some ways have their 'innocence' safeguarded. While they can learn from their parents and grandparents about the hardships of the past, they also need to be

given space to develop their own sense of where they are going and what they want to do with their lives.

Ideally, memory work efforts should become a regular part of enhancing social cohesion. It is conceivable that public facilities, such as community halls, open spaces, after-hours class rooms and sporting venues should be readily recognised as places where people go to affirm their sense of place in communities and neighbourhoods. By joining with and speaking to their neighbours in an on-going dialogue, a sense of common purpose and vision can be nurtured. The ways that an enhanced sense of achievement and self-confidence can work towards the upliftment of a community are manifold, such as better educational outcomes and fighting crime. This approach to memory work aims to elicit from people their own stories of agency, resilience, perseverance and decision-making. Further, painful ghosts from the past can be exorcised through exposure and recognition, much as the work of the TRC did. In fact, a well-structured memory project could be seen as finishing up and extending the functions of the TRC.

By definition, memory work talks about the past, giving it new and relevant meanings. In light of the unfinished business of the TRC, as described above, activities in this sector offer a much-needed *focus* to raise issues that have been unofficially silenced. The aim of memory work in the present time is to assist people to finish the tendency to blame someone else for their own miseries and to instead take full responsibility for solving their own everyday problems. The experiences of having enjoyed a safe space to air not only past frustrations, but to begin to construct images of a better future, can leave a lasting sense of self-worth and affirmation. Taking responsibility simply means having the courage and imagination to explore a range of solutions, looking for the best answer. When a person can make a difference to a relatively small thing in their lives, such as naming a street after a local hero, they can then start extending to bigger things, such as getting a formal qualification for better employment. Self-confidence grows, making problem-solving much easier. Memory work cannot heal all the pains of the past, but it can impart personal development tools which allow people to recover on an individual level.¹⁷

Since the proposed model is knowledge-based, using a combination of existing municipal facilities and competencies along with the skills and resources of civil society, it does not need massive investments in physical resources. The only cost lies in securing memory work expertise and programme development. Though not very expensive, the hardest part of setting up a memory project is likely to be convincing people of its value. Experience, however, has shown, that once people get a taste of what it is about, enthusiasm and support is readily

¹⁷ Field, 31.

forthcoming. The thinkers and planners around social cohesion can play an important role in promoting this kind of break-through.

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