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**“HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE PAST THROUGH MEMORIALISATION”**

In a post conflict situation, the positive role of museums in portraying identity can help promote national unity, stability and reconciliation within a society. It can serve to identify the nation for others, and facilitate its establishment within the international community. In doing so, it assists in encouraging economic investment, foreign aid and tourism

**Background:**

Having emerged as the Cinderella of the political world, South Africa as a transient society is faced with various challenges regarding the re-telling and re-presentation of the collective histories and memories of its people. Since the advent of democracy in 1994, the South African state has implemented various mechanisms that aimed to re-write the narratives of the past; forge reconciliation amongst citizens that were racially, politically and economically divided; and build a sustainable peaceful society. The inception of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1996 was one of first mechanisms that aimed to fulfil some of these objectives. 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).

The following presentation will briefly discuss research that was conducted with communities at two different memorial sites, questioning the efficacy of these sites in building sustainable peace as well as propose a model that seeks to ensure that memorial sites in South Africa can achieve their full potential as mechanisms for peacebuilding and sustainable reconciliation.

**Kliptown Ecomuseum Development**

The Kliptown Development is a multi-million Rand development that is sponsored mainly by the Johannesburg local and Gauteng provincial government. The development focuses on a tourism agenda and includes an ecomuseum as well as various other developments that promise various economic benefits for the community.

Research conducted with various segments of the community in Kliptown has shown that Kliptown is essentially a place of memory. It reflects the nostalgia of a community that longs for the days gone as it attempts to use the memories of the past to re-build the social fabric of a slowly fracturing community. As the birthplace of the Freedom Charter,<sup>1</sup> Kliptown has historically been a place that housed diverse groups of people that lived beside each other - celebrating both their unity and diversity. Not only was Kliptown amongst the first places to defy the various segregation policies imposed by the Apartheid state, but it was also the first town of the broader Soweto region.

While Kliptown was once the vibrant economic hub of Johannesburg, today its vibrancy is eclipsed by some of the more recent and popular urban developments within the surrounding urban areas. While remnants of the culture and community of the past remain ingrained in the memories of many, the communal sense of belonging is slowly beginning to fade. This is primarily due to two major reasons. During the implementation of the Group Areas Act, many Kliptonians were forced to re-locate to racially demarcated surrounding areas, such as Eldorado Park, Lenasia and Pimville. In addition, the early 1990's saw an influx of informal settlers who had no emotional ties to the history of Kliptown and the Freedom Charter. From their arrival into Kliptown until today, these communities have remained outsiders. Many old Kliptonians allocate the blame for the increasing decay and general lack of community to the new Kliptonians. This has also resulted in other divisions within the community and memory to the new Kliptonians. These divisions within the community between the old Kliptonians and the new Kliptonians have resulted in growing sense of intolerance amongst members of the community particularly with regards to race and religion. Furthermore, given the development in the area that has largely been driven by the memorialisation of the Freedom Charter, there is increasing competition for perceived benefits of the development. Old Kliptonians are beginning to see the value of their narratives and memories of the past to ensure their access to the resources that the development has to offer.

1 The Freedom Charter was the document ratified at the Congress of the People, held at Kliptown, Soweto, in June 1955, by the various member bodies of the Congress Alliance. The policies set out in the Charter highlighted the ideals of a democratic South Africa and included a demand for a multi-racial, democratically elected government and equal opportunities for all.

It is within this context of an ‘ideal past’; and present community divisions that have, arguably, been exacerbated to a large extent by the urban regeneration development, that the development has become a divisive factor instead of rekindling the peaceful, diverse community of days gone by.

Sharpeville Monument

Even before 1960 Sharpeville had a history of its own. Initially people were removed from Top Location and placed here. The forced removals from towns and the 1984 boycotts also form part of the events of the history<sup>2</sup>

There was a law from the government that we shouldn't be close to the towns... Top Location was said to be the black spot and people had to be settled somewhere [else]. The town council then, had this area here... [so they] felt that we needed to be brought here. Many people didn't like it.<sup>3</sup>

The signing of the Constitution was done in Sharpeville<sup>4</sup>

Sharpeville was established as a township in the early 1940's and today remains amongst one of the areas whose history continues to be an integral part of the South African political landscape and transition. Developed as a result of forced removals from an area called Top Location, Sharp Native Township which later became known as Sharpeville, developed as a result of Top Location's close proximity to the white business and residential area of Vereeniging.

Most people who were moved to Sharpeville resented the unattractive, regulated life of the township which was both incongruent as well as incoherent to people who were used to the urban vibrancy of life in Top Location. However, as with most South African townships, Sharpeville over the years began to develop its own unique identity that was highlighted through its social, cultural, political and economic activities<sup>5</sup>. The turning point of Sharpeville's political history and that of the rest of South Africa was a result of the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre in which 69 people<sup>6</sup> were killed and approximately 300 people injured by police as they participated in a PAC - organised protest against the Apartheid Pass Law system. According to the TRC Report<sup>7</sup> the Sharpeville Massacre marked a significant change in the nature of political conflict as the cycle of violence and counter violence, coupled with increasing human rights violations, escalated from that point onwards. The gross human rights violations and the excessive use of force by

2 Interview Mr. Nakana

3 Interview Mr. Leutsoa

4 Interview Mr. Kolisang

5 Interviews Mr. Leutsoa and Mr. Mohapi

6 While these were the official figures that were released, there is still much controversy around the number of victims. This was highlighted both in the focus groups as well as individual interviews.

7 Truth and Reconciliation report, volume 3, chapter 6

the police against peaceful protestors are further highlighted in the conclusions of the TRC report that states:

The Commission finds the former state and the minister of police directly responsible for the commission of gross human rights violations in that excessive force was unnecessarily used to stop a gathering of unarmed people.

Apart from the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, Sharpeville, similar to most townships in the Vaal region during the 1980's, experienced increased political violence. The event that was highlighted by both participants in the focus groups as well as interviewees was The Rand Boycott in 1984 that resulted in the deaths of many people as well as the loss of homes. This was exemplified by Mr. Leutsoa:

We had a system in the township where the town council was in control. They called it the Urban Bantu Council. Many [councillors] were puppets... some of them died in the township and many of them ran away...It was terrible in 1984...many houses were burnt and many people were killed [along] with the councillors.<sup>8</sup>

In a symbolic recognition of the atrocities that occurred in Sharpeville during the Apartheid era, the South African Constitution was signed on 10 December 1996 at the George Thabe Stadium in Sharpeville. Furthermore, in recognition of all those people that were killed on 21 March 1960, the United Nations has adopted March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and this day remains a national celebration of human rights in South Africa. It is within this context of political upheaval and change that the Sharpeville Monument today, has the potential to become a significant marker in recalling the memories of days gone by and the healing of a community that has experienced continued divisions and conflict.

Reconciliation

There is no peace between the PAC and the ANC because the PAC had wished that this monument [would] be its monopoly. The PAC believes that the ANC did not have a part to play in all this.<sup>9</sup>

Well for [reconciliation] interaction is needed. We cannot wait for the 21st of March and then try and meet. [It] is like we are inventing a relationship that we don't have during the greater part of our lives...Regular interaction and setting up a permanent programme for everybody can make sure that people reconcile.<sup>10</sup>

With regards to reconciliation, there was general agreement amongst focus group participants as well as individual interviewees that the Sharpeville memorial has been unsuccessful in

8 Interview Mr. Leutsoa

9 Interview Mr. Mohapi

10 Interview Mr. Kantso

reconciling the community. While both Mr. Kolisang and Mr. Nakana acknowledged that the aim of the site is to promote reconciliation and recognise those victims of the Sharpeville Massacre, they both highlighted that the site is still in its development phase and has therefore not been able to achieve its full potential as yet.

Despite these claims, focus group participants and other interviewees highlighted that the lack of reconciliation is a result of political clashes over the representation of the Massacre itself, where both the ANC and PAC claim ownership of the actual event. Mr. Kantso further highlighted this in his description of the separate commemoration ceremonies that the ANC along with government and the PAC host annually on the 21 March. According to participants in the youth focus group, the site has achieved a certain degree of reconciliation amongst families of the victims but as stated earlier, clashes still remain around the recognition of victims. Youth participants also highlighted their concern around the political clashes over memory, acknowledging that they were uninterested in the political issue and that these issues needed to be resolved to refocus on new issues.

In addition to the lack of political reconciliation, women in the focus group highlighted issues around survivor integration and reconciliation with the rest of the community. Survivors pointed out that when they were invited to participate in activities at the site, other community members questioned their “special” treatment. This ostracism coupled with the general lack of community understanding around issues of survivorhood has resulted in the further marginalisation of survivors.

## Conclusions

The two cases that I have highlighted indicate that while museums, monuments and heritage sites in South Africa do have the potential to foster reconciliation and build peace within communities, they have, inadvertently, become divisive mechanisms within the given communities.

While our research has shown that there are various factors that contribute to these negative effects, the key factors include:

**Negative Peace:** While South Africa has achieved negative peace in that there is reduction of direct violence, there remains within the society various structural forms of violence which includes the vast economic inequalities. As the gap between rich and poor widens, poor communities view memorialisation initiatives as a means to improve the economic situations, hence the competition over limited resources and clashes over authentic memory claims.

**Consultation:** Consultation that is undertaken to collect narratives or understand the needs of the communities with regards to the memorialisation initiatives are often politically biased and restricted to specific groupings. This at the risk of marginalizing specific groupings such as survivors of gross human rights violations, excombatants, women and youth. The result within the community therefore, is often one that exacerbates political divisions, general lack of stakeholder ownership of the sites and underlying tensions within the community.

To ensure that all groups, especially survivors of gross human rights violations, benefit from memorialisation projects, it is necessary that communities are skilled to be able to contribute significantly to memory and museum programmes. Additionally such projects should ensure that apart from the benefits of reconciliation and peacebuilding such projects should ensure that poor communities are able to economically gain from such endeavours so as to bridge some of the structural inequalities that remain barriers to the attainment of positive peace. The model outlined below has been piloted and developed by CSVr in an attempt to ensure that museums, monuments and memorials in post-conflict South Africa are able to achieve their full potential as a form of symbolic reparations.