



Volume **SIX** • Section **TWO** • Chapter **SIX**

**Report of the Reparation &  
Rehabilitation Committee**

**REPARATIONS AND  
CIVIL SOCIETY**

# Reparations and Civil Society

1. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the Commission) seized the imagination of many South Africans and, from the start of its work, initiatives aimed at healing and reparation sprang up all over the country. They provide an example of the enormous value of the role of civil society in the work of bringing about the healing and reconciliation our society so urgently needs. They also demonstrate the fact that reparation is a multi-faceted process and can be approached from many sides by many people. In other words, it needs to be seen as a national project to which we are all committed as South Africans.

## CREATIVE APPROACHES TO REPARATION AND HEALING

2. There are many examples of organisations, individuals, artists and events that have used creative approaches to begin to address the issues of healing and reparation. That they have seldom been given the same amount of publicity as the Commission itself does not detract from their importance. It would be true to say that some of the most profound experiences of reconciliation, acknowledgment and healing happened in intimate spaces away from the public gaze. This is as it should be, since it is in those intimate spaces that peoples' most powerful emotions reside. Many of these initiatives have a great impact on peoples' lives because details of the victim's experience and interactions between participants can be freely expressed.
3. This chapter outlines some such forums or creative expressions by various civil society groups and individuals.

## The story I'm about to tell

4. One such example is a theatrical play called *The story I'm about to tell*. This was (and still is) an initiative using acting, audience participation, real-life recollections of violations and an improvised script that was true to life events.
5. The actors are survivors of gross human rights violations, and indeed only act in the sense that they are on a stage engaged in a performance of their experiences. Their role changes to that of facilitators when, importantly, the play does not end, but moves on to include the audience in an interactive debate and discussion.

6. An individual who gave testimony at Commission hearings, Mr Duma Khumalo (a former death row prisoner), says that audiences seem to open up more and travel much further into the past than occurred at the formal Commission hearings. Members of audiences have expressed their difficulties about opening up and speaking of the past, which they had often kept secretly to themselves.
7. One such powerful encounter occurred whilst performing the play in Germany. The widow of a man killed by the South African Defence Force (SADF) approached the actors, saying that she had always felt that she would die in unresolved pain. However, through experiencing the stories retold in the play, she found herself able to forgive and let go.
8. The play was staged at the Grahamstown Arts Festival, one of South Africa's major arts festivals. After the play, an elderly white South African man approached one of the players, Ma Mlangeni, embraced her, sobbing, and then left without saying a word. For the actors, no words were necessary: such was the power of this intimate encounter.
9. In another instance, an audience member asked Duma Khumalo: 'How did you feel when you were about to die?' Mr Khumalo recalls being shocked that no one had previously felt able to ask him this. He attributes this to the unique power of the play. He summed up his experiences of performing in the play as 'a piece of delicious cake'.
10. Far from being simply a forum for profound moments of healing, the play has also proved a catalyst for expressions and questions that were often not articulated in the context of the Commission, especially those that were conflictual or anti-reconciliatory. While performing in South Africa, a youth expressed his sense of injustice at having to witness lies by perpetrators, asking, 'How do they expect us to feel?' In some instances, when the play was touring London and Great Britain, there were exchanges and debates between members of the audience about who had benefited from apartheid.
11. *The story I'm about to tell* is an ongoing initiative and many requests have been made for it to be staged in township contexts. Importantly, the play has received sponsorship from the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

## **The Healing of Memories Project**

12. The Healing of Memories Project is based in Cape Town and was established to facilitate the healing process of individuals and communities. It originated as the Chaplaincy Project of the Trauma Centre and is now the Institute of Healing of Memories.
13. One of the main techniques used by the project is workshops. The workshops were developed by the Religious Response to the Commission, now the Centre for Ubuntu and the Healing of Memories.
14. Each workshop is an individual and collective journey aimed at exploring the effects of the apartheid years. The emphasis is on dealing with these issues at an emotional, psychological and spiritual – rather than at an intellectual – level. Time is given for individual reflection, creative exercises and opportunities to share in a small group. Typical themes that arise are anger, hope, hatred, joy, isolation, endurance and a discovery of the depths of common humanity shared. The workshops end in a liturgy/celebration.
15. The collective and uniquely spiritual focus of this initiative marks it as one of the more profound treatments of the challenge of healing.

## **The Khumbula Project**

16. Khumbula was launched in Mbekweni, Paarl on 16 December 1998. A non-governmental organisation registered as a Section 21 Company, Khumbula aims to address the conditions under which ex-combatants of the South African liberation struggle find themselves. It has also recently launched an educational initiative.
17. Driven by volunteers, Khumbula's main aim is the exhumation of former Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cadres who died outside the borders of South Africa and assisting families to rebury the remains of their loved ones. A significant number of witnesses who approached the Commission requested assistance in locating and reburying their loved ones in a culturally appropriate way.

## **Khulumani support group**

18. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation played a significant role in the establishment of the victims' support group commonly known as

Khulumani. The philosophy behind this initiative is a belief that the violations of the apartheid era not only left deep psychological wounds in peoples' minds, but also left people with a sense of isolation and feelings of disconnectedness. Being part of a victims' support group was seen by many as having a therapeutic effect.

### **The Northern Province and Mpumalanga branches of the South African Council of Churches**

19. The Mpumalanga Provincial Chapter of the South African Council of Churches played a significant role in providing emotional and spiritual support, especially during the hearings.

### **CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR REPARATION**

20. Khulumani and some representatives of the faith community have publicly campaigned for the implementation of the Commission's Reparation and Rehabilitation policy.
21. Khulumani has not only mobilised the South African government and local business but has, in consultation with sister organisations such as Jubilee 2000, continued to emphasise the responsibility of local business and international governments and banks in respect of reparation and rehabilitation.
22. The Northern Province branch of the South African Council of Churches, under the leadership of Reverend Mautji Pataki, has also continued to play a significant role in campaigning for the restoration of the dignity of witnesses through a government-led reparation and rehabilitation programme. Their focus has been on mobilising government support at a provincial level, and exerting pressure on it to spearhead service delivery.
23. It is the Commission's view that, while government is both legally and morally obliged to pay reparation to individual victims, the responsibility for reparations goes far wider. With regard to the financial cost of reparation, the Commission believes that business, in particular, should bear some of the burden.<sup>75</sup> More broadly, however, other institutions of civil society, and indeed all South Africans, should be part of a national project of reparation and rehabilitation. (...p160)

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<sup>75</sup> See this section, Chapter Five.