

# LESSONS FROM THE INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION'S SCHOOLS' ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 2004–2010

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## ABSTRACT

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) works in post-conflict societies guided by its vision to establish fair, democratic and inclusive societies on the African continent. It seeks to do so through four programmes one of which is 'Building an Inclusive Society' where the Schools' Oral History Project (SOHP) is located.

In pursuit of the above a variety of processes are explored within formal educational curricula as well as community-wide appreciation of multiple-perspectives as well as multiple-voices that will contribute democratization of local historical consciousness and documentation.

Educators and learners are assisted to explore the notions about the construction and production of history; the methodological approaches to the oral history process, and the various ways in which the oral history research could be presented.

The IJR's oral history project has conducted projects in five provinces.

A number of provisional lessons:

- Older and younger project members from diverse communities are eager to acquire new skills and knowledge in understanding and making contributions to their communities;
- project participants enjoyed to engage the Other in safe spaces;
- local government structures seemed interested to participate but in many instances were overwhelmed by their core business of service delivery;
- one of the ways to stimulate the interest in and development of local history could be to start platforms where aspects of local history could be explored across historical divides.

## INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation works in post-conflict societies guided by its vision to establish fair, democratic and inclusive societies on the African continent (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2014). It seeks to do so through four programmes<sup>1</sup>

one of which is ‘Building an Inclusive Society’ (BIS) where the Schools’ Oral History Project (SOHP)<sup>2</sup> is located.

This paper will outline the genesis of the SOHP at IJR, its implementation in six of our provinces<sup>3</sup>, explore some of the challenges regarding implementation and conclude with some of the preliminary lessons learnt.

## THE EVOLUTION OF SCHOOLS’ ORAL HISTORY PROJECT AT IJR

Our past as South Africans, like the past of any country and people subjected to oppression and exploitation, contains many untold experiences about people, places and events that brought us to the dawn of the democratic era. However, a master narrative about the defeat of the apartheid state is already taking root that denies our multi-faceted and multi-layered past. Hard-won democratic spaces for contrary voices and views need to be treasured.

The broadcasting of Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) proceedings in 1996 and subsequent weekly episodes by Max du Preez on SABC television presented South Africans with vivid portrayals of some gross human rights abuses during apartheid. For many family members, friends and comrades it was the first time that they could speak out about the pain, suffering and hurt of loved ones. Despite its many shortcomings the TRC process did try to establish what happened under the system of apartheid from 1960–1993 (Villa-Vicencio & Verwoerd 2000; Ross 2003; Posel & Simpson 2002).

However laudable the work initiated by the TRC process, much more is required to understand how apartheid and colonialism impacted on South Africans. Colonialism and apartheid as oppressive and exploitative systems stripped the majority of South Africans from being citizens in the land of their birth. Through the stories told at the TRC forums the master narratives of apartheid rule were challenged publicly. Unspoken stories about the violence of apartheid meted out against individuals and groups were given a wider audience.

Many more stories, however, need to be told. At one level the airing of the stories about apartheid brutality has had a negative impact on certain sections of South African society. Consequently, the TRC proceedings were viewed as suspect and partisan against the former ruling group. Some commentators and even historians charged that the TRC process was flawed because it did not highlight in an even-handed manner the atrocities perpetrated by the liberation forces (Verbuyst 2013).

The multiple lines of political, economic and social division of South African society have persisted to the present. However, progress is being made to counter this on a variety of fronts. Important mile-stones are the adoption of the Interim Constitution in 1993 and the 1996 Constitution with its Bill of Rights; the opening of the radio airwaves with burgeoning talk shows; the flowering of cultural expression; and public debate.

In 2004 the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) initiated the SOHP to

explore the use of oral history as a tool for reconciliation. A number of resource guides were produced for teachers based on project experiences in the Western and Northern Cape provinces which were compiled as SOHP's first series, *Making apartheid history – my contribution*.<sup>4</sup>

One of the unintended consequences of the TRC process has been that some South Africans were seen either as having been a 'perpetrator' or as a 'victim', coinciding more or less with the white and black fault-line in South African society. The fledging South African democracy requires inclusive definitions of nation-building rather than the perpetuation of the divisive categories reminiscent of apartheid classification. Moreover, the undoing of apartheid consciousness necessitates deliberate strategies that will contribute to new ways of interaction and collaboration among South Africans (IJR 2009:65).

Post-conflict societies<sup>5</sup> face many challenges and one of these is to develop an understanding of what happened in the past and to use different understandings of the past to forge a shared future based on fair, democratic and inclusive principles. A raft of approaches, processes and tools are required to undertake such a project of national reconstruction and development.

In South Africa the TRC hearings provided a view, albeit a partial one, of our immediate past since 1960. It set in motion a process for South Africans to revisit the past. Needless to say, there has not been universal agreement that uncovering South Africa's apartheid past could assist us in building a different kind of society. Some hold the view that the past has been dealt with by the TRC and South Africans should leave it at that and move swiftly to build the New South Africa.

Societal conflict stems partly from unequal access to resources, survival of people and discriminatory practices. Parties to past conflict are sometimes forced by internal and external forces and conditions to settle. As part of such a settlement parties are afforded a range of choices of how to proceed to reconstitute or reconfigure relationships to transcend the divisions of the past. One of those choices is societal reconciliation.

Reconciliation can be defined as a process involving parties of past conflict dealing with the issues that gave rise to conflict, and getting a comprehensive understanding of the nature and extent thereof, with the intention of working towards improved understanding and mitigating future occurrence of previous negative conditions (Eisikovits 2010).

Apartheid allowed limited ways for fellow South Africans to get to know one another as South Africans of equal worth and status. Rather, it decreed that citizens engage and experience the Other through racially defined roles premised on inequality. Hence, integral to the reconciliation process is the 'rehabilitation' of the Other as a fellow human being capable of being an equal 'subject' of history.

Much of the discussions that followed in the wake of the TRC were conducted in the mass media dealing with issues of 'reconciliation' and the 'past' on a national level. Very few initiatives were undertaken to explore issues of reconciliation at a local

town level. One explanation for this could be that engaging in matters of reconciliation at a local level brings about discomfort. Face-to-face engagement at local level was eschewed and talking to the Other was left to political leaders at provincial and national levels, experts or academics and newspaper columnists.

## Goals and Objectives of IJR's SOHP

Building on the story-telling work done in Cradock and elsewhere by the IJR<sup>6</sup> the Schools' Oral History Project (SOHP) was initiated in 2004. The objectives of SOHP have been to generate new teaching material for educators in teaching the new post-apartheid school curriculum; to explore the use of oral history methodology as a tool to contribute to reconciliation in our country; bring learners from different cultural and language backgrounds together to explore the past; promote inter-generational dialogue; and, produce new historical knowledge about people, places and events.

Many experiences of formerly marginalized groups, communities and individuals have not been recorded. Moreover, in many instances, in many historical texts, they appear as mere objects of history. One of the challenges was to document the experiences of these kinds of groups and communities in a way which validates and honours their experiences, and at the same time expose young persons to learn lessons from the older generations.

Initially the oral history methodology was merely used as a tool for recovery and uncovering the lived experiences of people under apartheid. But a clearer focus was developed when the IJR was required to adopt the logic model to develop IJR's integrated monitoring and evaluation system. The SOHP directly contributes to attain Medium Term Objectives (MTO) three and five.<sup>7</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF ORAL HISTORY IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES IN SEVEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

### The first oral history project

The first project tackled by SOHP dealt with the resistance to pass laws in the Western Cape and to document some of the experiences of ordinary citizens.<sup>8</sup> We decided to pilot our approach at a district level. A partnership with the Provincial Education Department was initiated. The subject advisor for history was the driver of the project at district level and a project team at IJR.

The target learner group was grade 11. The reasons for this, the history curriculum for grades 11 and 12 includes the period 1948–1976 (Apartheid), and also the relative fewer demands on the time of grade 11 learners, e.g. preparation for grade 12 examinations.

Fifty grade 11 learners were selected from five culturally diverse schools. One of the reasons for this was to create an opportunity for learners to work jointly to discover what the recent past was like and to recover some of the hidden histories. Working

together across historic divides contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the past and an appreciation for one another.

The following schools were selected, our base school in Langa, Ikamvalethu High School, Pinelands High School, Athlone High School, Jan van Riebeeck High School, and Rylands High School. The selected schools were quite varied in terms of school organization, resource endowments and discipline.

After the selection of the schools in consultation by the subject advisor for history, meetings with the school managers and history educators of the selected schools were held to explain the project and negotiate participation. This was followed by briefing sessions of all grade 11 learners at each school. This ensured that all the learners could hear first-hand about the project and questions and concerns could be addressed. The project participants were selected by a combination of self-selection and selection by the history educator.

There were a number of guidelines for the learners<sup>9</sup> as well as for the educators.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the project cycle it was clear that the schools benefited from the fact that the project work formed part of the new history curriculum; the lesson plans were developed by the subject advisor for history; and, the participation of some members of Black Sash as interviewees were an added bonus. On the other hand, it was realized that adequate contact time for project learners would have enhanced team-work; that learners found the transcription process tough; and finally, the involvement of the language educators with the development of the stories written by the learners would have enhanced the quality of their written pieces.

## The second oral history project

The second project was also implemented in the Western Cape and dealt with the forced removals in terms of the Group Areas Act from Constantia to the Cape Flats.<sup>11</sup> Constantia was selected because it is lesser known than the forced removals from District Six and other places.

Five schools in the Metropole South Educational District were selected, that is, Fairmount Secondary School, Grassy Park, being the base school, Fish Hoek Senior High School, Fish Hoek; Lentegeur Senior Secondary School, Mitchell's Plain; I. D. Mkize High School, Gugulethu; and Sinthemba Senior Secondary School, Phillipi. A large number of the former residents of Constantia settled in the greater Grassy Park.

In January 2005 I accompanied the subject advisor, Mr Spencer Janari, to the participating schools to discuss the project with the school managers and history teachers for grade 11 at the selected schools. During February, I visited participating schools and addressed all the grade 11 history classes at the respective schools. About 400 learners attended these briefings. The project was outlined: how it would fit in with the history curriculum and the selection criteria and expectations of project members. The selection to participate in the project was a combination of self-selection on the part of the learners and guidance of the teachers. Fifty-four learners were selected from the

participating schools. On completion of the project each learner received a honorarium and certificate attesting to their participation. The project members were trained in oral history techniques and methodology during the March school holidays at Fairmount Senior Secondary School.

A reference group, consisting of the subject advisor for history and the grade 11 history teachers from the participating schools and IJR met twice. At the first meeting the content of the lesson plans to be taught during the second school term were developed. At the second reference group meeting the text-writer for the Resource Guide presented a draft outline which was discussed and approved.

The project was fortunate to engage Christopher Petersen, a key member of the Constantia Land Claims committee. He organised about twenty former residents from Constantia to be interviewed by the learners. He also acted as a guide when the group visited the various sites in Constantia as part of the training. Former residents of Constantia were interviewed by the learners at Fairmount Senior Secondary School. The interviews were transcribed and the learners wrote profiles of those interviewed.

For many of the participants their involvement in the project has been a profound emotional, and in some instances, life changing experience. The feedback that has been received from learners suggests that the project has gone beyond a mere historical overview, toward a greater understanding of injustice and the very harsh human impact that apartheid has had on ordinary individuals. Interviewing its victims has made the injustice of the past real in the present to many of these learners. Qaasim (17) writes that ‘after the project I did further research and found out that my great grandfather used to live in Constantia and that I didn’t even know that. Some people say that it was apartheid years and that we should look forward and forget about it. But how can we forget about something like that?’(in Esau 2005: 9).

Some tentative lessons drawn from this project on forced removals are:

- experiential approaches to teaching history inculcate a profound sense of understanding the past and appreciating it;
- learners enjoy mixing with their peers from different communities; the learners enjoyed acquiring new skills, documentation and interviewing skills, and applying those in concrete situations;
- many learners were prepared to go the extra mile once they had done their first round of interviews; and
- the oral history process creates new platforms for young people to engage with older persons and vice versa.

### The third oral history project<sup>12</sup>

The third project took us to two locations in the western half of the Northern Cape

Province, Namaqualand and Siyanda districts.<sup>13</sup> The established implementation project cycle developed during the first two projects was relied on in this project. However, a number of innovations were introduced. Firstly writing workshops were introduced to assist learners once they have conducted their interviews. Once the folktales were written by the learners, the local office of the provincial department of Arts and Culture recruited a number of community artists. They attended a week-long session with an art teacher to interpret those stories visually. Those visual interpretations were used in the resource guide that was produced. In addition, the stories were recorded in a studio in Cape Town by some of the story tellers and learners in a number of languages<sup>14</sup> on compact disk.<sup>15</sup> Three outputs were produced, that is, the resource guide for educators, an anthology of folk-tales and an audio compact.

The *Stories op die Wind* CD, together with the multilingual anthology and resource guide is an outcome of a developmental process involving research, storytelling and writing skills undertaken by over 100 learners, community artists and community workers in the Siyanda and Namaqualand districts in 2006.

Through intergenerational dialogues with the elders in their communities, the participants researched and later conducted interviews which culminated in a collection of over forty spoken folktales. Katriena Esau, fondly referred to as Ouma Geelmeid, a ǀKhomani San elder aptly captures the mood of the elders:

*Dié stories het ek nie in Afrikaans gehoor nie. My ouers het dit aan my vertel in N/u daarom ken ek nou nog die taal. Maar deesdae praat die ouers en die kinders nie die taal nie. Ons stories word ook nie oorvertel nie. Nou, nou hier is ons geleentheid...voor die kuns uitsterwe.*<sup>16</sup>

With the help of trained mentors and a professional editor, Marlene Winberg, the participants were assisted in developing the recorded spoken folktales into written stories. Tremendous effort was taken to promote multilingualism in the context of marginalized indigenous languages. With the help of Nadisa (Nama Development Institute of South Africa) the entire collection was translated into Nama. N/u, the language of the ǀKhomani San is linguistically speaking underdeveloped in written form. As a result, the project could not translate full stories into N/u. The project relied heavily on the local N/u speakers and SASI (South African San Institute) to assist in the translation of key words in N/u in each story. One of the biggest challenges faced by local N/u speakers and language practitioners was translating certain modern words from Afrikaans into N/u. In some cases the N/u speakers borrowed words from the Nama language.<sup>17</sup>

Each folktale contains an introduction of the folktale which help to contextualize it; is accompanied by short biographies of the writers and storytellers; is accompanied by a community-based artist expression of the folktale; contains discussion points to assist artists in expressing storytelling in various art genres; can be printed in Nama and Afrikaans. At least five of the folktales can be printed in English; contains an audio

glossary containing highlighted key words which can be heard in Afrikaans, Nama and N/u; and a glossary of words and terms indigenous to the Northern Cape

The young project participants indicated that the stories resonated well with them. Not only did the stories contribute to a better understanding and appreciation of past lives, indigenous knowledge and practices but also a rediscovery of a rich oral tradition. Furthermore, the older storytellers have risen in the estimation of the younger generation giving rise to increased respect. In addition, the storytellers have discovered an additional sense of self-worth and recognition from young people.

### The fourth oral history project

The fourth project explored the bridging of the apartheid divide in two Western Cape communities, Paarl and Hout Bay.

Emerging from an apartheid past that was characterised by deliberate separation of residential and educational spaces for diverse communities, the establishing of a democratic and non-discriminatory state requires the creation of a multitude of safe space for cross cultural interaction and collaboration aimed at forging democratic attitudes, mutual appreciation and opportunities for the acquisition of intellectual tools to contribute to a democratic society.

The construction of a non discriminatory South African society is a slow and arduous process. There is still the deep-seated perception of ‘us’ and ‘them’ that conform by and large to the apartheid categories employed to promote separate racial identities. One of the challenges of establishing a democratic and non-discriminatory society is to deal collectively with the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in ways that are liberating for all while providing a platform for critical engagement about the mechanisms and modalities of building inclusive communities.

Geographical separation has been a signal feature of apartheid that has physically reinforced and fed upon the promotion of racial group identities. With the scrapping of the Group Areas Act in the latter half of the 1980s and the introduction of formerly Model C schools, deracialisation was initiated. However, these processes were based on income levels without challenging and altering the basis of apartheid discrimination. The net effect of this has been that individuals with middle and upper income from formerly excluded groups moved into formerly white residential group areas and formerly Model C schools. Needless to say that the vast majority of South Africans fall into lower income brackets and therefore remain in the formerly apartheid designated group areas and racially segregated schools.

Hout Bay had been selected on account of longstanding and historic tensions between diverse communities. Hout Bay has in recent times been the site of bitter and hard fought battles around land and housing, pitting resource rich against resource poor communities. This resulted in a brokered agreement that provides a basis for consensus access to land and residential development. Paarl witnessed the uprising in 1960 of Poqo, the military wing of the PAC and communities were scarred by the implementation of



the Group Areas Act. Mbekweni, the Black African residential area is situated more than five kilometers from the Paarl business hub.

The participation was secured from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), participating schools,<sup>18</sup> learners, identified communities and collaborating organisations.<sup>19</sup> The WCED had the following responsibilities: ensure the project fits with curriculum requirements, participate in project implementation, provide access to educational institutions, develop lesson plans and identify appropriate resources for project implementation.

The principal partner organisations were the district WCED Education Management District Centre (EMDC) offices. In addition, a number of role-players were identified that are contributing to social cohesion. Consultations with EMDC (South) and Overberg/Boland EMDC with regard to project feasibility and to identify potential schools to participate in the project took place. Included in these consultations was an exploration to determine the respective contributions to be made to the project, moreover, to secure drivers for the project from the EMDC (South) as well as Overberg/Boland EMDC who would co-manage these projects. A project reference team was constituted from the EMDC (South) and Overberg/Boland EMDC drivers, educators from the participating schools, CVET, and IJR.

The selection of project participants was facilitated by the relevant educator in accordance with the project criteria, self selection as well as drawing on the knowledge and experience of the educator.<sup>20</sup>

For the first time in 2008 grade 12 learners from Hout Bay High School participated in the project. These learners reside mainly in two densely populated areas in Hout Bay, that is, Imizamo Yethu (mainly Black African residents) and Hangberg (mainly Coloured residents). The curriculum advisor for history, Ms Bridget Tobin strongly motivated the inclusion of the entire class in the project on the basis that their project work would constitute their CASS, that is, Continuous Assessment, portfolio for history. All the grade 12 history learners were trained in Oral History Methodology and Techniques, Writing and Photography. Fifteen of these learners also participated in the Video Production process.

Thirty grade 11 learners from three high schools in the semi-urban district of Paarl participated, Charleston Hill High School, La Rochelle Girls' High School and Noorder-Paarl High School. Two curriculum advisors, Alex van Stade and Mike Willemse from EMDC Winelands along with history teachers from each school were involved in the project.

Learner participation in the various training workshops varied greatly with noticeable lower participation from the grade 12 Hout Bay learners who had no choice in participating in the project. In this regard, the project was reviewed to include Grade 12 learners.

In Paarl the majority of the project participants were drawn from Charleston Hill High School (19), La Rochelle Girls' HS (initially nine) and two from Noorder-Paarl

HS. Learners from Charleston Hill HS were from the Afrikaans class. The learners from La Rochelle GHS and Noorder-Paarl HS were from the English class. The two learners from Noorder-Paarl HS participated in the same training sessions with the Afrikaans-speaking learners from Charleston Hill HS. The learners from La Rochelle GHS received their training in Oral History methodology and photography separately on account of them having arranged their holiday programmes in advance. However, they did attend the same writing training session with the learners from the other two schools. The two learners from Noorder-Paarl HS were consistent in their attendance. Unfortunately, one of the learners residing in the Free State could not participate in the film production course because she had to return home during the school holidays.

In Hout Bay the project participants consisted of a smaller group of Afrikaans-speaking learners and a larger English-speaking group. The latter group was virtually all non-English mother tongue speakers and consequently this had to be factored into developing accessible training material, as well as workshop presentations. This is also reflected in the written outcomes at the writing workshops.

Attendance from the Afrikaans-speaking groups proved to be more consistent than the English-speaking group. This could be ascribed to, on the one hand, the teacher having had a firmer control over the relatively small group, whereas the bigger English-speaking group's attendance fluctuated a great deal. However, there was a core of about fifteen learners from the latter group that attended the sessions open to all.

## Educators and Subject-Advisors

Four educators, one each from La Rochelle GHS and Charleston Hill HS and two from Hout Bay HS participated in the project. In addition one subject-advisor for history from EMDC (South) and two from Winelands EMDC participated. The teacher from Noorder-Paarl HS did not participate beyond his initial selection and submission of the names.

The subject-advisors attended the first training workshops and in the case of the subject-advisor from EMDC (South) also attended the interview session at Hout Bay HS. The educators were pivotal to the success of the project in that they motivated the learners to sustain their involvement and were also responsible for making the logistical arrangements for the various workshops in conjunction with IJR programme staff.

However, the role and expectations from subject advisors, educators and schools should be canvassed in greater detail as has been done until now. The various responsibilities, expectations, recognition, incentives and time-frames should ideally be negotiated during the preceding year of project implementation and be spelled out in detail in a memorandum of understanding.

The first four oral history projects were also published in one volume, title *Making*

*apartheid history – My contribution*. It also included a separate chapter on the oral history methodology for budding oral historians.

SOHP then embarked on a second series of oral history projects titled *Building Blocks for Democracy*. It consisted of three projects which was conducted in Cradock (2009), Welkom (2010) and concluded in Potchefstroom (2011).<sup>21</sup>

## The Cradock oral history project

This project differed from IJR's previous projects in several respects: firstly, it focused on the status quo of the citizens of Cradock and required them to imagine Cradock in 2019, 25 years after the dawn of democracy; secondly, learners from historically Black African, White and Coloured backgrounds were recruited to work in project groups on an identified local project; thirdly, project members kept journals in which their reflections about project participation and experience were recorded; fourthly, collaboration with local government, libraries and sites of memory were organized. Learners' documentation and journals would form part of an archive on democracy in Cradock that would be located at a site of memory or local library that could be available to social historians and other interested parties.

Cradock was selected on account of longstanding and historic tensions between different historical racial and income groups. In addition IJR piloted its Community Healing Project there. This new oral history intervention on *Building Blocks for the Democracy*, would enable youth and learners from these particularly deeply divided communities to elicit, record, document and share stories from their respective communities across racial and class barriers.

In 2009 South Africans participated in the fourth democratic elections of the national and provincial government. These elections presented an ideal opportunity to record and document how the election campaigns of the various political parties were conducted, what issues and in what manner they are raised, as well as explore how the issues of nation-building were canvassed. Moreover, learners from Cradock would be able to track memories, feelings, views, fears and hopes of the people of Cradock that abounded at the time of the first democratic election in 1994, and the subsequent elections of 1999 and 2004.

The central goal of this project was to create a platform on issues that are pertinent to nation-building. Key among these is the ability of young people to engage critically with their social context and to acquire awareness and skills that will contribute to them becoming social change agents. The central goal of this project consists of the following subsidiary goals: foster greater understanding and appreciation of past events and experiences among diverse learner communities; create collective learner opportunities for diverse learner communities; stimulate interaction between diverse learner communities; and, empower learners with core skills in research, oral history methodology, interview and multi-media presentation skills.

Two interesting components were added to the Cradock oral history process, that is, oral history and the archive as well as intergenerational dialogue on a vision for Cradock 2019. The first workshop was presented by the national English Language Museum (NELM.) from Grahamstown. The key objectives of the training session were, to introduce archiving as an important process element in the oral history methodology, and, secondly, to explore the setting up of a digital archive.

The second component, exploring a vision for Cradock by 2019 was facilitated by two local pastors. At the workshop adult and youth members engaged one another through an interactive process. Participants were drawn from the three historically racially defined communities, that is, black African, Coloured and White.

As stated in the resource guide produced as an output for the process:

Some of the key challenges for communities in post conflict situations are to acknowledge the past and also to craft a desirable future that is inclusive and recognizes past injustices. In all probability, this complex process requires, amongst other things, willingness on the part of individuals and communities to explore and negotiate a new *modus Vivendi*, a range of activities and events aimed at providing spaces and platforms for engagement, economic justice and the creation of new symbols signifying a fresh start and inclusiveness (IJR 2009: 64)

At the workshop *Vision for Cradock 2019* held over two sessions one of the outstanding aspects highlighted by the majority of participants was the appreciation of engaging fellow Cradonians across the historic divides as fellow participants. As one Black African participant put it when s/he goes home will tell his/her family that s/he 'fell engaged with Coloureds and Whites'. Another participant put it as follows, 'I will tell them that I had a nice time because I was sharing ideas with White and Coloured people and that it was fun.'

It is clear that the first step is to provide a platform for exchange and that considerable thought be given as to how it is constituted. Since 1994 the norm has been that structured interaction across the historic divides has been facilitated through political parties. These entities were viewed as being legitimate representatives of various, largely historic racial, constituencies. Engaging the Other was on the basis of political party programme. It perpetuated the 'us and them' characterization of the broader South African society.

The need for a more inclusive process that seeks to promote understanding and rapprochement, that is, identification of local social capital, the changes required and how the transformation required could be effected. Moreover, that the negotiations or multi-stakeholder dialogue feature becomes the preferred method of building a different and inclusive society.

## The Welkom oral history project

This project was initially conceived to explore the construction of a non-racial society in

Welkom, Free State. However, following a training workshop that was held for history educators, this broad thrust was narrowed to focus exclusively on the education sector.

Impressions of how residents relate in post-apartheid South Africa are consistent with the IJR's Annual South African Reconciliation Barometer<sup>22</sup> findings with regard to racial interaction on a day-to-day basis. The kind of integrated spaces that exist are in the workplace and in the former Model-C schools. By and large pre-democratic residential patterns persist.

Right from the outset of the project efforts were made to recruit project participants from across the apartheid divides. However, at the time no white learner at Welkom's public schools was taking history as a subject. On the other hand, the history educator at Welkom High School was white and participated wholeheartedly throughout the project.

In Welkom like most South African towns apartheid prevented inhabitants to get to know one another as fellow South African citizens. They experience the 'Other' primarily through the racial lens, in short the adverse social distance of the past shows little signs of crumbling. In addition, there are other fault-lines like huge income disparity, social status and ethnic divisions that militate against making common cause. For example, an educator who hails from Limpopo Province was asked by local Welkom educators why he had come to teach in Welkom 'passing Johannesburg to where most people are flocking to.'

As an indication that locals can start to view themselves and others differently, project participants produced four short video documentaries, virtually all comparing various aspects of education in townships and one former Model-C school ranging from discipline, safety and security, as well as the former Bantu Education and the new education curriculum.

The Welkom SOHP empowered educators and learners with knowledge and skills to contribute to a different looking at themselves and Others.

## The Potchefstroom oral history process

This project had three components to it, that is, history educators, education students from North West University (Potchefstroom campus) and learners from various schools in Potchefstroom and Ventersdorp. However, the main focus group was the history educators.

Seven educators attended the training sessions. Two of them were from Ventersdorp which is about 60km from Potchefstroom. The teachers' experience ranged from 6 to 21 years in the education sector.

The process of changing place and street names has elicited substantial interest locally and in the rest of the country. In terms of the colonial history Potchefstroom served as the initial capital of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. The area in which they settled was also occupied by Sotho-, and Tswana-speaking people. As the establishment of the town of Potchefstroom proceeded the Voortrekkers imprinted its identity on the townscape. This was in line with a universal practice that whoever emerges as victors

in war, subjugates the former foe and puts its identity stamp on the landscape. After the Second South African War, with the influx of English speakers, a process was indeed initiated to change the names of a number of streets to reflect the new political reality of British rule. In that process Church Street was renamed King Edward Street. However, an initiative to have that decision overturned was started and shortly after the National Party came to power in 1948, the Afrikaner groupings were successful in having King Edward Street changed back to Church street. After the name change process initiated by the City Council in 2007 Church Street was renamed Walter Sisulu Street.

## Sharing of experiences of Apartheid

Participants shared their knowledge of Potchefstroom before apartheid and how the landscape was impacted on by forced removals in terms of the Group Areas Act. 'Prior to 1958 the African and Coloured people of Potchefstroom were located in Makwateng, a township outside the town, while the Indian and Chinese people lived in an adjacent area about three kilometres from the town centre. After 1958 all Africans, Indians and Coloureds were forcibly removed moved to Ikageng (Black Africans), Mohadin (Indians) and Promosa (Coloureds) respectively, in terms of the Group Areas Act' (IJR 2011: 22).

During the course of training a spontaneous discussion took place. Here are a few excerpts (IJR 2011: 22): 'one cannot just change everything that refers to the past, because it would be tantamount to distorting the past.' Furthermore, 'history cannot be only about the things one agrees with'. Moreover, 'places have different histories and none should be suppressed'. 'The new street names should not only have reflected national heroes but local ones.' 'Maybe an expert panel inclusive of academics should have been asked to research the issue of street names in Potchefstroom and have made recommendations.'

The spontaneous discussion focused in a very direct manner on some of the key aspects of the oral history project. Most of the participants supported the need for changing some street names because the street names in the CBD of Potchefstroom reflected Afrikaner heroes and excluded the majority Black African population. Furthermore, participants argued strongly that a thorough research process should have been undertaken before embarking on changing street names. For example, they contended that the name change process in other parts of the country should have been examined and could have yielded some insights about the process.

## Oral accounts of colonial experience

Some of the educators were participants in the Time-travel South Africa which utilises re-enactments and role-plays of historical periods as teaching tools. In addition, one teacher was also active in a local history project, Tlokwe Heritage Foundation. They indicated that the oral history training provided an additional tool to document local history.

Most of the names selected as new street names since 2006 have been those of national leaders from the anti-apartheid struggle. In one instance, however, Dan Tloome, was given to the new council chambers. In the process of conducting the oral history interviews names of people who played key roles in the local anti-apartheid struggle also emerged.

During the first training session, educators engaged in an impromptu discussion on how the past should be remembered and why the wholesale change and removal of offensive names and items will distort history.

The interview with Theo Venter provided a very broad, yet coherent narrative and insight into the minds, as well as motivations, of those who were opposed to the changing of street names.

A student-teacher participant in the visual literacy workshop from Viljoenskroon in the Free State believes that one cannot understand contemporary issues without exploring the history of those issues. He viewed his experience as invigorating because he collaborated with people whose views did not always accord with his, and he viewed that as an enriching experience (IJR 2011: 54).

The impromptu discussion referred to earlier, made the teachers realise how inter-related the narratives of the various identity communities are. But some of them also clearly articulated the view that the various divides, stereotypes and prejudices brought about by colonialism and apartheid would require a radical break from that past and those beliefs.

Here are some of the post-training feedback: 'The importance of documenting and archiving local and family histories'. 'Extend (the training) to cover a whole range of issues and include whites.' 'I was not aware about the impact of the names of streets and places have on citizens but now I know.' 'I (now) know that I also have to greet someone else first and not wait for him/her to greet me first, whether Black, White or Coloured.'

The training has also highlighted the need for documenting local history, as well as family histories which will simultaneously contribute to the democratization of the local archival and historical record.

A project participant in the visual literacy workshop who majors in English and History cited an experience he had with learners at a school in the Free State who felt that the history of apartheid is forced upon them and that they preferred looking forward instead of looking back. He was of the view that the visual literacy training course stimulated his thinking and made an impression on him (IJR 2011: 54).

## PROVISIONAL LESSONS LEARNT

At the launch of the Welkom oral history resource guide the Provincial Subject Head for history in the Free State stated that history was fast becoming a 'township subject' and in addition, dwindling numbers of learners were taking history as a subject. These are indeed worrying trends because in post conflict societies it is important that various perspectives and voices must engage the past and together explore a desirable future.

In the limited ways in which SOHP has worked in the various communities as indicated above, there are reasons to be positive about the following:

- Older and younger project members from diverse communities are eager to acquire new skills and knowledge to acquire understanding and make contributions to their communities;
- project participants enjoyed to engage the Other in safe spaces;
- local government structures seemed interested to participate but in many instances were overwhelmed by their core business of service delivery so that they could not participate in the documentation of local history;
- one of the ways to stimulate the interest in and development of local history could be to pursue educational institutions, museums, libraries, community organizations, faith based organisations and local media to start platforms where aspects of local history could be explored across historical divides.

## CONCLUSION

There are many challenges facing South Africans in building a post-apartheid society, and in order to overcome the many divisions along the lines of race, colour, ethnicity, religion and class which have been enforced since colonial times, we require conscious and deliberate initiatives. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that past socio-economic and political systems have caused a lot of trauma and should be taken into account when projects of this nature are considered.

Educators and learners together with members from civil society across the historical divides, to varying degrees, have shown a willingness to acquire new knowledge and skills to contribute in material ways to the production of new historical knowledge and thereby assist in the processes of democratizing the local historical record.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The other programmes are Communications & Strategy, Policy & Analysis and Justice & Reconciliation in Africa.
- 2 The BIS has the following additional projects: *Memory, Arts and Culture* (MAC), *Community Healing* (CH), *Ashley Kriel Youth Leadership Development Project* (AKYLDP) and *Education for Reconciliation*.
- 3 The resource guides have been published by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (2004, 2005a, 2005b). For the Northern Cape Province see (IJR 2007); for the Eastern Cape (IJR 2009); for the Free State Province (IJR 2010); and for North West Province (IJR 2011).
- 4 *Making apartheid history – My Contribution: An oral history resource guide* (2008).
- 5 For example Rwanda, Argentina, Chile, Bosnia, etc
- 6 A project based on the notion of '*masiyithathe apho siyeke kona*' (isiXhosa) ['let us fetch it where we left it'] was developed. It was designed to use memory as a tool to assist those



who were once central to the struggle against oppression, and who became alienated by and excluded from the new dispensation. Through a range memory exercises, it allowed such people to rediscover their innate resources as a basis for engagement.

- 7 MTO 3: Historical narratives based on exclusivity and oppression are deconstructed and inclusive narratives based on fair and democratic principles are developed ; and MTO 5, communities which were previously divided across socio-economic and political conflict are constructively engaging in ongoing dialogue with one another.
- 8 See fn. 5 above
- 9 For project work to be done outside contact time, the in/exclusion of project work as part of learner portfolio had to be negotiated between educators and learners. Parents of participating learners would sign indemnity forms for the project work done outside official school time, and the learners would receive a stipend on the successful conclusion of the project.
- 10 In addition to their facilitative role in respect of the learners, the educators were required to attend all the training sessions, they had to participate in the content discussions on the resource guide and, finally, they would receive a honorarium at the end of the project depending on the availability of funds.
- 11 See fn. 5 above
- 12 See fn. 5 above
- 13 Namaqualand District – Springbok, Kharkhams, Steinkopf, Kommaggas, O’Kiep and Concordia. Siyanda District – Kakamas, Upington and Rietfontein
- 14 Afrikaans, English and Nama
- 15 This CD contains a multilingual anthology of 24 folktales passed on from generation to generation in the Northern Cape communities of the Namaqua district (Okiep, Springbok, Steinkopf, Kommaggas, Concordia, Kharkhams) and Siyanda district (Rietfontein, Askham, Andriesvale, Philandersbron, Welkom, Kakamas, Riemvasmaak and Upington).
- 16 ‘These stories I did not hear in Afrikaans. My parents told me those stories in N/u that is why I still speak the language. But nowadays neither the parents nor children speak the language. Our stories are also not transmitted from generation to generation. But this project affords us an opportunity to preserve those stories before they disappear into oblivion’ (translated by author)
- 17 The project promotes storytelling in other art genres by the inclusion of visual art expressions of the folktales in the CD. These visual art pieces were created by community artists who have subsequently formed an art network, Studio Tshepang, in the Northern Cape. Each visual art piece is inspired by the individual artist’s interpretation of the imagery and symbolism in a particular folktale. The San music which can be heard throughout the CD is an expression of artist and musician, Garth Erasmus’ exploration of his identity. His personal journey has led to self-made replicas of San musical instruments which he has used to create a musical expression honouring his San ancestry.
- 18 Hout Bay – Hout Bay Secondary School and in Paarl – Charleston Hill Secondary School, Noorder-Paarl High School and La Rochelle Girls’ High School.
- 19 Community Video Education Trust (CVET).
- 20 Some of the project selection criteria were, commitment to participate in the project till conclusion, willingness to attend training sessions during weekends and school vacations, and to complete all project assignments.

21 See fn. 5 above

22 Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. Retrieved from <http://reconciliationbarometer.org> (accessed 9 December 2014).

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