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Title: Memory, the TRC and the Significance of Oral History in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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Introduction

I write as an angry oral historian. A central concern for this paper is that oral history is facing the threat of becoming even more socially and academically marginalised and under-funded than it was during the apartheid era. While I particularly draw on Western Cape experiences, I suspect that many of these experiences will have resonance for people in other regions. For example, in Cape Town, due to lack of funding both the People's History Project at UWC and the Western Cape Oral History Project at UCT are facing severe financial difficulties. Competitive funding markets, universities in financial crisis and a lack of clear planning are contributing to this erosion of oral history projects. The proceedings of the TRC have paradoxically - and unintentionally - contributed to the promotion and marginalisation of oral history. However, the TRC experience could open-up possibilities, provided the 'truth' and 'reconciliation' process is acknowledged and funded as a sustainable project for documenting, maintaining, interpreting and disseminating public memory.

Hofmeyer has written about the 'quiet methodological' debate around the uses and interpretations of oral history in South Africa (1995). In part, this debate has been between empiricist uses of oral history and interpretative uses of oral history that draw on post-structural ideas. This paper is an attempt to turn up the sound volume of this debate.[1] However, it is crucial that this debate around the theory and methodology of oral history should not be confined to research issues. The following themes are explored in this paper: Firstly, it asserts a particular position on the conducting and interpretation of oral histories and memories. Secondly, it argues that the TRC process raises several fundamental questions about public memory and the nature of 'healing'. Thirdly, it identifies and critiques trends in the conceptualisation and funding of oral history projects. Fourthly, moving beyond the TRC, I will argue that the significance of oral history is not merely symbolic but there are many contributions that oral history could make to public memory processes in post-apartheid South Africa.

Reflections on Oral History and Memory

> The future it looks bright, although my wish is that the killings stop. The killings maybe stop. This is bad. This is bad. This is bad. People should come together and be one. No complaint. It's not necessary for one to complain, it's only that apartheid, and it has done a lot of damage. If it was not for this apartheid, this is a very, very, very good country, it's the South Africa, very good. But, apartheid has done a lot of damage (Mr. A.Z., Guguletu resident quoted in Field 1996).

The evocative power of the spoken voice needs to be heard, documented and interpreted. In its simplest form, the oral history method is premised on a dialogue between a speaking interviewee and a listening and questioning interviewer. This method can be harnessed to collect oral history, oral poetry, oral literature, oral traditions, oral performances and various other oral forms. Oral historians and oral history projects in South Africa and other African countries have a history of gathering the stories of oppressed, marginalised and economically poor people. This form of

research, teaching and communication - with a range of potential outcomes - has profound value for South Africa's socio-political transformation.

Oral history and in-depth qualitative interviewing have also contributed to a vast academic collection of historical, sociological, psychological and anthropological works in South Africa. Furthermore, qualitative research methods such as ethnographies, participant observation and focus groups are all closely related to, and complement, oral history interviewing.[2] As the works of many oral historians have demonstrated, research that relies solely on written sources bears the risk of presenting only the views of the dominant groups and classes within society (e.g. Bozzoli 1991; Hofmeyer 1993). The emergence of a critical African history, as a challenge to the social, political and intellectual influences of colonialism and imperialism, has therefore drawn heavily from the oral histories and oral traditions of the continent (e.g. Finnegan 1970; Furniss and Gunner 1995). In this sense, oral history interviewing has the potential to document the view or rather the views from below and the margins.[3] The development of African history as it stands today would be inconceivable without oral history methodology.

While it is strategic to acknowledge and encourage different applications and interpretative approaches to oral history work, I feel that oral history is best utilised when the rich complexities of memory, myth, identity and story-telling are interpreted. Debates around the construction of social memory and oral narratives have the potential to tell us more about the past and the present. However, this oral history debate should not become bogged down in forms of post-modernism where political actions and development projects become unthinkable. Simply put, how people remember the past, speak about the past, and what they did in the past, will reveal complex insights into the story-teller's agency (or lack of agency) in the past and present.

All research methods have their strengths and weaknesses. Contrary to the positivist view that sees oral history as being 'subjective' or undermined by the 'unreliability' of memory, I would argue that a central strength of oral history is precisely its direct dialogues with living historical actors. However, oral dialogues with historical actors do not fix the authenticity of these 'voices' or their stories (Minkley and Rassool 1998). Rather, oral history dialogues give the researcher a way of documenting and interpreting the inter-subjective realities or discourses that are constructed between interviewer and interviewee. These oral texts or narratives provide a variety of possible insights into the social relations and worlds in which interviewees and testimony providers live their lives and construct their meanings. Oral history has the capacity for dynamic participation in and opening up of interpretations and understandings of popular hermeneutics. Interpretative insights into oral story-telling and memories will help us develop a hermeneutics of the past and present, which will be especially important for South Africa in this post-authoritarian transitionary period. It might also help us identify, interpret and combat the rise of new forms of political and cultural authoritarianism. What then are memories?

> ...memory, so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force; that is dynamic - what it contrives symptomatically to forget is as important

> as what it remembers - and that it is dialectically related to historical thought, rather than being some kind of negative other to it. ... memory is historically conditioned to the emergencies of the moment; that so far from being handed down in the timeless form of 'tradition' it is progressively altered from generation to generation. It bears the impress of experience, in however mediated a way. It is stamped with the ruling passions of its time. Like history, memory is inherently revisionist and never more chameleon than when it appears to stay the same (Samuel 1994: x).

Memories are not static blueprints of the past but are always shaped and filtered in complex ways. Memories are a set of experiences, images and feelings that are articulated to fulfill the needs and pressures of the present. As Coleman puts it, 'Memory is much more than recall of past stimuli. It involves emotion, will and creativity in the reconstruction of the past to serve present needs' (1986: 2). Memory offers different forms of valid information about the past. But this information is always, as is the case with all historical methods, socially constructed in a relationship between past and present.

Memories are also not a set of experiences trapped in an atomized individual world. Memories are social constructions. Even when memories are experienced as being personal and intimate, they are forged through shared patterns of culture and language.[4] The material of memories is the experiences of the past and present; but the words, sentences and stories shaped around these experiences, feelings and images have been internalised from the world around. Also, the culturally accepted practices, rituals and rules that are learnt guide people in how to respond to and make sense of their memories. For memories to have meaning and significance, they need to be conveyed in storied forms that are understandable to partners, friends, relatives, neighbours and others. People need others to engage with and evaluate their memories, and in the process they are creating and maintaining a sense of self and identity (Lowenthal 1985).

In the context of the oral history interview, the ways in which people narrate these memories into stories about themselves and others provides the interviewer with clues about the construction of identity (Field 1996). Trying to read oral narratives through a crude true/false binary is usually unhelpful. However, by trying to hermeneutically trace and understand how people make their 'truths' is an useful interpretative approach. As Krog argues, 'Is truth that closely related to identity? It must be. What you believe to be true depends on who you believe yourself to be' (1998: 99). Furthermore, how people remember, forget and silence the distant and recent past is central to the making of collective forms of identity in the present.[5]

Memories and identities, and their relationships, are never fixed but are open to change over time (Weeks 1991). Public memories are particularly influenced by the fluid uncertainties of collective myths and personal fantasies. People do not simply remember what happened, they very often change these memories to fulfill personal wishes or to fit community, cultural or traditional myths (Samuel and Thompson 1990). For example, the volatile and often violent social conditions of the communities where many interviewees live, means that memories of the past are often tailored in such a

way that people can cope with these pressures (Field 1998). As Michaels puts it, 'History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers' (Michaels 1996: 138). All social memory, be it documented through the oral, written or visual mediums, is both reconstructed and selective (Connerton 1989). These so-called 'distortions' or 'mistakes' of memory, whether they are transmitted through the spoken or written word, should not be ignored or silenced. These so-called 'mistakes' often conceal profound psychological truths about the storyteller (Portelli 1991) and can provide meaningful insights into the formation of gendered cultural identities (Hofmeyer 1993).

Social and public memories are constructed within a context of shifting power relationships. Access to opportunities to narrate one's memories and stories for audiences are shaped by position, resources and power relations. However, there is no power free research nirvana to be reached where pure research 'truths' will be accessed (Bhavnani, 1990). Rather, the 'truths' that are constructed through research processes are always made within relationships or dialogues of power. Oral historians can offer an empathetic listening ear to those whose stories are usually ignored or silenced because they occupy disadvantaged or marginalised social positions. The 'voices' that tell these stories are always filtered through culture, language and ideology. But, as Brink puts it, '... whatever the variety and extent of 'versions' available to one in any situation, and however exclusive many of these may appear to be, this does not mean that nothing happened' (1998: 42).

Oral history may not offer a universal truth (assuming such a thing exists) but neither is it false - what it does offer is evidence of the contestation between different meanings and truths about what happened in the past. Different interviewees often provide conflicting, contradictory and multiple versions of the past and present (Field 1996). Furthermore, at times individuals will provide contradictory views and stories within their own testimony (Grossman 1994). By sensitively documenting and interpreting these competing versions, oral history can create dynamic hermeneutic histories of the past and present as constantly being struggled over.

For the interviewee or testimony provider to speak their experiences and emotions is fundamentally an act of public memory-work. The telling of oral stories is dialogically structured through a shaping and speaking of memories, which were previously experienced as 'private', to a public audience. This is even the case if the only audience to hear this testimony is the interviewer/researcher. Oral history interviewing is therefore a significant starting point to public memory-work. Moreover, as the listeners and the audiences to these oral stories expand the interpretative/power struggles over public memory-work becomes more complex. There are important differences between the nature of oral testimony in an oral history interview, in contrast, to the more ritualistic oral testimonies given at the TRC. Nevertheless, the experience of the TRC provides crucial lessons in the making of public memory.

The TRC, 'Healing' and Public Memory

History is what hurts ... (Jameson, 1981: 102).

Some of the primary 'costs' of the apartheid era were not 'material'. There were interwoven and incalculable emotional costs, such as pain and loss, suffered by the majority of South Africans (Field 1996). When I began my Doctorate in the early 1990s, I was astonished to find how many people responded in surprise when I asserted the above, seemingly obvious, argument. Now, as we enter the end of the life span of the TRC, such an argument is common place, even part of popular 'common sense'. Herein lies both positive potential and considerable danger. In broad terms, the potential lies in identifying the emotional cost of apartheid as a major social need that requires a serious response. But there is a danger that which is seemingly 'common-sense' will be marginalised or de-prioritised as no longer important because the TRC has done its job and we can now happily move into the 'rainbow' future.

In a related trend, several authors have correctly questioned whether the TRC's role as the 'maker' of 'official history' has sanitised or silenced other stories and meanings (Leggassick and Minkley 1997; Bozzoli 1998). Lalu and Harris argue that, 'In the perception of the TRC, history lies waiting to be uncovered – the facts are self-explanatory, and when compiled will provide a common past for all South Africans – or so it is assumed' (1996: 24). Indeed, what theoretical approaches and interpretative strategies should be used to approach the oral testimonies given at the TRC? Furthermore, are TRC testimonies going to be appropriated in service of essentialist historical and nationalist approaches? (Harris 1998). For example, while I share Asmal *et al.*'s (1996) moral outrage towards the apartheid system, their political positioning on a moralistic high-ground is deeply problematic. In her interpretation of the TRC hearings in Alexandra, Bozzoli argues that:

> In the very act of defining a public realm, and thus opening up the possibility for ending of the seclusion of the poor, the hearing oversaw a complex process whereby a <u>new</u> silencing and seclusion began to emerge, through the silences of the hearing and the partial appropriation of what <u>was</u> said by a nationalist discourse (her emphases) (1998: 193).

As an oral historian, I am particularly concerned about the relationships between constructions of 'the private' and 'the public'; and the 'individual life story' and 'official/documented history'. As Steedman argues, 'The telling of a life story is a *confirmation* (her emphasis) of that self that stands there telling the story. History, on the other hand, might offer the chance of denying it' (1992: 49). Oral historians and other researchers have a responsibility to not only critically examine but to also challenge 'new' and 'old' forms of silencing and marginalisation.

The setting up of the TRC had several laudable motives; not least, the aim to promote 'healing' and 'reconciliation'. However, the TRC process has developed around, on the one hand, the need for reconciliation for nation-building and collective history-making purposes, and on the other hand, the healing and financial reparation of the individual (and family) lives of trauma survivors. The hope was that by documenting 'truth-telling' oral testimonies (and written testimonies) the TRC would help the South African nation achieve the above motives. This conceptualisation is captured in this statement by President Nelson Mandela: 'Only by knowing the truth can we hope to heal the terrible wounds of the past that are the legacy of apartheid. Only the truth can put the past to rest' (<u>Time</u>, 31/7/1995). Bluntly put, it is unrealistic to think that a

commission with a limited life span, and facing complex political pressures, could both capture 'the truth' and 'heal the nation'. Historical truth is always socially constructed from the perspective and dynamics of the present (Nuttall and Coetzee 1998). Historical truth also cannot be 'bottled' (except in the realm of myth) and 'administered' as contemporary 'medicine' for the wounds of the past.

While the TRC aimed to contribute to the emotional 'healing' of apartheid survivors, the TRC process was primarily a politically motivated, legal and administrative process. This legalism undermined the extent to which the TRC process contributed to 'healing' (Skinner 1998). Furthermore, the legalism of the TRC process had a direct bearing on who was allowed to testify, what was testified, and how this was testified to the TRC commissioners and public audiences. The TRC tended to focus on the legally prescribed taking of testimonies (driven by the political goal of 'reconciliation'), in contrast to the more open-ended approach of oral history testimony (Skinner, 1998). It is crucial that we do not confuse or conflate the attempts by politicians and lawyers to achieve political closure with the apartheid survivors' struggles to reach a degree of emotional closure. The struggle for emotional closure for individuals and communities is going to be a long-term process across generations.

The multiple 'truths' and storied fragments of the apartheid past need to be heard, documented and responded to, if people's agonies are to be at least partially resolved. Publicly expressing what has been privately endured for years can be a 'healing' experience. However, the act of 'truth-telling' in itself is insufficient for 'complete' healing and falls far short of what is necessary for these survivors to rebuild their lives. The 'healing' possibilities of oral testimony should not be exaggerated to mythical curative levels. Furthermore, neither the past nor history simply cures emotional wounds. Rather the creation of ongoing public spaces and collective processes for people to talk, write, publicise, represent and inscribe the social and political significance of their experiences and emotions have the potential for personal 'healing' and the renewal of communities. For example, community sites of memory, empowerment programmes, and other reconstruction and development programmes in communities are needed.[6]

Oral testimonies then, are but one crucial avenue to be explored. Oral history interviews should not be conceptualised as merely for information gathering purposes, but as a dialogic process where empathetic listening is a crucial element (Anderson and Jack 1993). For example, oral history can help the speaker to gain a greater degree of emotional composure (Thomson 1994) and develop cognitive insights into their agency (Tonkin 1992). Furthermore, oral testimony can be a potential catalyst for people to engage in empowering activities, beyond the context of the testimony (Field 1996). These are some of the small but important contributions that oral testimony can make to the 'healing' of the agonies of the apartheid past.[7] Reminiscence therapists have also constructively used oral history with the elderly (Coleman 1986; Ritchie 1995).

Sadly, the 'healing' will never be 'completed'. The risk of re-opening old emotional wounds will always exist after a degree of resolution and closure has occurred. Once an initial, partial emotional healing has occurred, much of the emotional reparation work is about how people manage, cope or live with the uncomfortable emotional

traces which will always remain, to varying degrees, in their conscious and unconscious memory. Paradoxically, getting people to talk about their traumas is not always the best healing strategy, listeners/interviewers often need to respect the speaker's right to silence (Erskine 1996). However, the past and its unsettling emotional and social consequences should not be crudely closed off, sealed, silenced or forgotten. Public memory-work should not be about 'putting the past to rest' but involve constructively and sensitively keeping open the spoken and unspoken dialogue between present needs and past experiences. The process of 'healing' and making public memory needs to be reconceptualised as a broader, long-term, sustainable social process for generations to come. Building the community based institutions, partnerships and processes that will contribute to public memory must be central aspects of this strategy.

Making the oral testimonies of the TRC publicly available (with suitable clearances from the interviewees/testimony providers) when they are lodged at the South African Archives is important. The South African Archives initiative to set up a registry of oral sources and archives is another positive step. How public memories are collected, managed, and disseminated are also of crucial importance (to be explored later). But to what degree is it necessary, to ethically regulate the use and dissemination of TRC testimonies? The individual's right to restricted or non-disclosure is vital; however, how are the rights of the individual to be balanced with the broader public interest? To state an obvious question, who will hear and document the testimonies of the thousands of survivors of human rights abuse who fall outside the understandably narrow ambit of the TRC? Furthermore, it is important to move beyond the TRC's narrow focus on 'victims' and 'perpetrators' of 'horrendous human rights abuse'. Oral history interviews need to be conducted with people who resisted - or supported or worked for - the apartheid system in a variety of less dramatic (but no less significant) ways than the testimonies heard at the TRC. In this vein, what about the survivors of forced removals. A strong case could be made for a form of 'truth' commission to be set up for the 3.9 million potential restitution beneficiaries (Mqogi 1999). People who experienced forced removals suffered many forms of pain and loss, and these emotional 'costs' of apartheid have been endured for decades.[8] The need for public memory-work, across the spectrum of apartheid's brutalising experiences, is about the need for spaces for people to tell their stories, and for these stories to be disseminated to as many public audiences as possible. However, the horizon of what is possible is usually limited by what is financially feasible.

Funding Oral History: Who will put the money behind the words?

> A specter is haunting the halls of the academy: the specter of oral history (Portelli 1998: 63).

In my experience as a researcher and teacher and as a coordinator of an oral history project at UCT, there seems to be considerable interest in conducting oral history and learning the art of oral history interviewing skills. This interest seems to cross academic disciplines, NGOs and parastatals. Institutionally, there are four organisations in the Western Cape which conduct and promote oral history. Firstly, there is the Western Cape Oral History Project at UCT; secondly, the People's History

Project at UWC; thirdly, the Mayibuye Centre and Robben Island Museum partnership; and fourthly, the District Six Museum and its sound archive. A striking comparison across these organisations is that while the university based research and training projects are facing severe financial difficulties, the two museums are growing. The two museum structures have not done much actual oral history research themselves but they have a wide range of interview collections deposited in their archives. There are other museums-based oral history projects such as those at the Simonstown Museum and the Caledon Museum. In addition, there are various NGOs in the region which use oral history methods in conjunction with various research and/or development projects; for example, Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at UWC and the Surplus Peoples Project (SPP).

On a national level, the collection of oral histories and traditions has been identified as central to the process of reconstruction and development by various academics, museums and the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST).

> Every effort should be made, through research into surviving documents, photographs and particularly oral history, to trace the direct involvement of all concerned with a particular memorial. In particular, the formerly silenced voices must be heard. Commemorations of conflict and war should include multiple perspectives - there should be a feeling amongst all South Africans that their own history is respected and reflected, directly and indirectly in commemorations (DACST discussion document, Legacy Project 1996).

In a similar vein, the National Heritage Act of 1999 stresses the importance of oral history, cultural tradition and popular memory but subsumes these activities under the fashionable notion of 'living heritage'. While the Act attempts to encompass all of the various aspects of the national heritage, its focus is primarily on what it defines as 'tangible heritage' (read material) as opposed to 'intangible heritage' (read social/cultural). This is a false dichotomy. The so-called 'tangible' and intangible' are always interwoven in the day-to-day practices of people. It is in the minds of academics and policy-makers that these dichotomies are created. This particular dichotomy allows policy-makers to rhetorically enunciate the importance of aspects of 'intangible/living' culture like oral history, but the primary policy and financial prioritisation remains so-called 'tangible heritage'. However, the DACST is considering the setting up of a 'Living Heritage Council'.[9]

'Oral history' is often used as a rhetorical device by government policy makers and parastatal employees. For example, note the rather ineffective role played by the Amasiko Committee of the National Monuments Council (NMC). The NMC as an organisation is a good example of an organisation unable to conceptualise a way out of traditional split between 'the built environment' and 'amasiko' (i.e. living heritage). Furthermore, oral history and oral narratives are used as authenticators of essentialist understandings of 'culture' and 'ethnic groups'. This has also been the case during TRC hearings (Harris 1998). Essentialist understandings of culture also dominate in parastatals such as SATOUR (Minkley, Rassool and Witz 1996).

Oral history is neither inherently 'empowering' nor an automatically 'progressive' tool for development. It can also not act as a substitute for community participation work. Rather, effective community outreach or participation strategies need to be developed if the heritage sector and related sectors are going to be genuinely transformed. Oral history is not the panacea for transformation problems, but (as will be discussed later) can be utilised as a significant research, training and participatory tool. While the rhetorical presence of the words 'oral history', 'oral tradition', 'living heritage' (and related terms) has increased, the funding and resources put into oral history and public memory have not.[10] There is some positive value to rhetorical enunciations but these are insufficient in the world of resource allocation and fund-raising.

The global funding climate has become more competitive in the 1990s and many organisations, especially NGOs, have found it difficult to raise sustainable funding. More specifically, with the reduction of state subsidies, universities face their own budgetary/financial problems and are therefore less likely to put financial resources into research projects. The university shift towards channeling the bulk of resources into 'core activities' i.e. teaching, means that research is viewed as the work of full-time academic staff. Consequently, research projects are being viewed as an unnecessary drain on university resources. In this university context, access to internal funding is non-existent and access to external fund-raising opportunities is heavily restricted.

At UCT, the rise of technocratic discourses, constructed and policed by administrative and financial bureaucrats, has potentially dire consequences. In a similar fashion, the false dichotomy between 'the tangible' and 'the intangible' helps shape technocratic discourses that are either merely accommodating or antagonistic to the humanities. While it is crucial to be sensitive to the budgetary constraints faced by universities, it is also clear that UCT's commitment to research and extension services has been influenced by technocratic understandings of education and training. For example, senior UCT officials have openly stated that UCT's fund-raising priority is 'buildings and capital infrastructure'.[11] At this moment in South Africa's transformation, it is necessary to ask: Why is there a tendency to put more money into buildings and machines and not into people? Raising more money for bursaries for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is not a sufficient response from UCT. The academic project and mission of the university should not be reduced to dealing with the functionally 'tangible' aspects of education and training. Furthermore, the collection, training and dissemination of African oral histories and oral traditions can directly contribute to the transformation and Africanisation of the university. Therefore, I still hope that influential people at universities like UCT will grasp the brief window of opportunity that remains.

Moving beyond the university environment: even if universities allowed greater access to private sector and foreign donors, the task of 'selling' oral history is not an easy task in the current milieu. For example, funders tend to look more favourably on material and economic development at the expense of social, cultural and human development. Again, this problematic dichotomy between material and human development is used as a way of de-prioritising oral history and related research and cultural activities. When social and cultural development is funded, it is the glossy, sexy, high profile forms of cultural activity, such as the Standard Bank Arts Festival, which succeed. Obviously, oral history can be 'packaged' in ways that are more

attractive but stories saturated with the pain and sadness of a 'mama' or 'tata' from Guguletu or Alexandra are not going to sell more commodities in the market place. The public value of the memories and experiences of people should not be determined by their marketability. If the making of public memory is driven by what is marketable, as opposed to what is going to contribute the public service of communities, then South Africa faces the prospect of massive attrition of its cultural and heritage resources. While foreign donors will remain a crucial fund-raising source, South African NGOs cannot only rely on these donors, and winning the battle for private sector 'social responsibility' money is going to be critical. There are some exceptions, but it is clear that more private sector companies should be funding social and cultural development in South Africa. The lesson to be learnt is that the profile and potential contributions of oral history need to be raised, and memory-work should be a central theme of this strategy.

Beyond the TRC: Who will continue listening?

> At the core of the struggle for home lies the struggle for the way the story of place is told. Between what is remembered and what is forgotten, the self takes its bearings home. The question is no longer who is to guard the guardians, but who is to tell the story? Who can bear witness? (Warner 1994: 86)

I have no doubt that thousands of South Africans want to and are prepared to tell their stories. The problem is: where are the listeners? Who will have the skills, funding and courage to bear witness after the TRC has fulfilled its legislative responsibilities? While there are many good individual listeners in different organisations and parts of South Africa, there is currently no appropriate institutional structure for this public memory-work. A broader collective and political strategy, using several mediums and tools of representation, is needed if ordinary South Africans' experiences, feelings and stories are to be heard, documented and conveyed to a range of public audiences. Oral history is but one crucial research, educational and representation strategy that could be utilised. Contrary to the view of oral history as merely a supplement to the written record, I will argue that the possible contributions of oral history to public memory are broad ranging. Bearing in mind financial constraints, if oral history projects and activities are to not only survive but to grow and expand, then the way forward must be boldly proactive.

It is time for oral historians to promote and develop the oral history methodology and applications across academic disciplines and across the boundaries of academia, government and NGOs. The use of oral history techniques by doctors, social workers, lawyers, development workers and many other professions should be encouraged. Oral history can also confidently stake its claim as a research, training and development tool (Slim and Thompson 1993). Historically, oral history has been used in various development orientated NGOs in South Africa since the early 1970s. Worker and adult education NGOs have made specific use of oral history and life stories to help adult learners acquire literacy and language skills. During the 1980s, oral history was a central part of efforts to popularise history for broader audiences (Bozzoli 1990; Odendaal 1990). But as Legassick and Minkley (1997) correctly point out, this has radically declined with the political changes in the 1990s.

In general terms, the life stories, memories and experiences of economically disadvantaged and marginalised communities must be seen as a priority for research documentation. Given South Africa's conflictual past, it is also critical that contradictory and competing voices be documented and presented, and that the making of histories should not simply create a new form of master narrative. The sensitive recording of oral histories can contribute to the process of changing South Africa into a more open and democratic country. But interviewing and the development of publicly accessible sound archiving of oral stories are only the beginning of making public memory, not the end. If serious public memory-work is to be done, then it is imperative that these stories move beyond the confines of the academy and the archive. Therefore, more attention and resources need to be put into the application and dissemination of oral histories, oral traditions and life stories to a broad range of public audiences.

On the issue of public accessibility, it is extremely problematic that the TRC reports have been removed from the internet. Juta publishers are charging high cover prices for these reports, which put these so-called public documents out of the reach of most South Africans. Why should public access to these documents be (effectively) restricted, and these documents turned into marketable commodities? It is ironic to note how little research has been done about how people who testified to the TRC, or those who were excluded from testifying, feel about the TRC process and its reports (Skinner 1998).

> The role of having their story recognised and treated with respect was very important. Those who participated and suffered to obtain liberation in South Africa need to have their contribution recognised. ... There was a sense that the respondents needed to be included in the history of South Africa. This sense of being forgotten is heightened in the rural areas where so little attention is generally given (Skinner 1998: 9).

Providing the space for the initial oral testimony is important, but much more can and needs to be done to disseminate these stories. Here are some examples of how oral histories can be used for educational purposes: The life stories of working class men and women, from urban and rural settings, could be incorporated into school and university curricula through public history books, text books and videos.[12] Local community projects such as teaching students to do oral history interviews with their own family members and neighbours can make small contributions to re-building the cross-generational relationships, which were damaged by apartheid. These cross-generational relationships are vital to the transmission of personal, family and community memories. These public memories also form essential ingredients in the process of developing a positive sense of neighbourhood, community, citizenship and cultural identity. The dialogues that are created between students and interviewees from different places and positions in society is also an experiential and process form of learning, as opposed to rote learning.

Oral history projects and institutes could develop the capacity to build sustainable exchanges and partnerships between academics and students on the one hand, and NGO workers, government departments, parastatals and most crucially, members of

the community, on the other hand. Here are a few more examples of oral history applications: community radio programmes, museum sound exhibitions, community sites of memory with plaques and storyboards, video documentaries, drama productions and multi-media educational tools.[13]

There are many international examples of documenting the stories of trauma survivors. To name but one, the Holocaust Project - set up by Steven Spielberg - has funded the video-taped interviewing of all Holocaust survivors. While the cathartic release that may come from telling life stories is important, it is even more important that these stories and their lessons are conveyed to the present and future generations. While the broadcasting of TRC testimonies on radio and television was probably an important contribution to making public memory, it might also have deepened existing social and political divisions. The act of broadcasting 'raw' testimony does not guarantee the creation of a constructive public memory. How these TRC testimonies and related oral histories can be 'produced' to educate, inform and expand public consciousness and memory, is a vital process that needs to be critically examined and developed.

Oral historians have many roles to play in the making of public memory. But we need to overcome certain problems. Firstly, there is the dispersed and isolated nature of oral history projects across the country. Secondly, there is the sporadic nature of funding to oral history projects. Thirdly, the lack of profile of oral history work and projects, and the related misperceptions of oral history. The answer to all three problems resides in the need for organisation.

On a global level, there is the 'International Oral History Association' (IOHA). However, the participation of African oral historians has been limited. At the last IOHA conference in Brazil, there was only one oral historian from Africa![14] Again, funding seems to be a central problem. Nevertheless, I think it is time for African and South African oral historians to organise themselves into some form of 'oral history association'. This paper therefore calls for a South African or Southern African or perhaps even an 'African Oral History Association' to be launched. This is by no means an original idea, but I hope that my paper will trigger sufficient interest so that a working group can be set up. This paper also calls for academics, NGOs, government officials and funders to think critically about the ways in which oral history is conducted and applied, and how it could contribute to public memory-work beyond the life span of the TRC.

Conclusion

This paper has been a strange animal to write. It has several loosely connected elements, which are sustained by a persistent argument for conducting and interpreting oral history as a fundamental part of public memory-work. Oral history is much more than just a research method. Oral history can make significant contributions to education, training, dissemination, development and heritage strategies. Yet, oral history in the broader social sense is also a set of day-to-day lived practices, which are integral to all cultures. Moreover, oral history interviewing techniques must be central to recording the life stories of the thousands who fall outside the ambit of the TRC, and who experienced human rights abuse under apartheid. Finally, if these various

forms of oral history are to be conducted, preserved and disseminated, then public memory-work must be conceptualised as a sustainable long-term strategy. This strategy would combat the marginalisation of oral history, and instead forge a dynamic future role for oral history and make interweaving 'tangible/intangible' contributions to reconstruction and development in South Africa.

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Endnotes

[1] I will not sketch the different positions in this debate. For an overview of this debate and related issues, see La Hausse (1990), Hofmeyer (1995), Rassool (1997), and Minkley and Rassool (1998). I will rather assert a particular position around issues of memory and oral history. More significantly, this is also an argument for shifting this largely university-based debate to focus on the fundamental pressures facing oral history in South Africa today. For example, these include funding, fund-raising, organisational networks, public dissemination and applications.

[2] Obviously oral history and the collection of written documentary sources can combine well; however, historians often forget that oral history has been used in a wide range of creative ways by sociologists, anthropologists, social psychologists, linguists and many other disciplines.

[3] The work of Bozzoli (1991), van Onselen (1996), Keegan (1988) and other people connected to the University of Witwatersrand's Oral Documentation Project have been central here. For a critique of these works see Rassool (1997).

[4] In a private experiential sense, personal memories do exist, but these personal memory constructions are not divorced from the social world. All memories, even personal memories, are constructed through conscious or unconscious dialogues with 'others', be these 'others' real or imagined.

[5] For an useful literature overview of collective, public and social memory see Harris (1998).

[6] Individual and group psychotherapies have an important role to play in this 'healing' process. However, the financial costs of these practices make them an unaffordable option for most trauma survivors. The debriefing and counseling offered by Trauma Centres are clearly important here. In the absence of (or in addition to) these institutions and resources, collective 'healing' processes through public memory work are going to be crucial.

[7] Oral historians are neither psychotherapists nor social workers and the primary motive of oral history remains research-related. However, if oral historians are trained to be empathetic listeners and sensitive questioners, then they can make small

contributions to 'healing' processes. Oral historians can learn much from related practices like psychotherapy (and vice versa).

[8] See Field (ed.), forthcoming (2000), 'Lost communities, Living Memories: Forced Removals in Cape Town' (Juta Publishers).

[9] The DACST has commissioned the African Cultural Heritage Trust to consult various role-players and organise a Living Heritage workshop (which will happen in May). One of the proposals is the setting up of local and provincial Living Heritage Councils and a National Living Heritage Council. While the emphasis on 'living heritage' (which includes oral history and popular memory) is welcomed, in these cash-strapped times one must wonder whether so many new, and potentially bureaucratic structures, are necessary.

[10] For examples of these rhetorical enunciations, see recent Council agendas of the NMC.

[11] I am here quoting the Director of UCT's Department of Development, Professor Andy Sillen. See also, UCT's The Monday Paper April 12 – 19 April, Volume 18, No 8.

[12] For an excellent example of a public history publication that draws on oral histories and memories, see Bickford-Smith, Van Heningen and Worden (1999).

[13] For useful tips on oral history for development purposes see Slim and Thompson (1993). Ritchie (1995) also contains useful chapters on oral history teaching and applications.

[14] The IHOA is conscious of this problem and wants to set up an African oral history panel for the next IHOA conference in Turkey in 2000. Any suggestions in this regard would be appreciated.