

Legacies of Violence and Trauma's Repair in the Global South

Report of a conference hosted by
the Centre for the Study of Violence and the Reparative Quest

6-9 December 2022
Cape Town, South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

“Transgenerational transmission of trauma” has become one of the primary ways in which legacies of violent histories have been understood in the humanities and social sciences and in civil society organisations. The concept’s foundation is built on the study of real-life narratives and witness testimonies of survivors, as well as on literary narratives about survivors’ experiences and the relationship that descendants have with historical trauma of successive parental generations. In this context, it is argued, the memory of past traumatic experiences is transmitted to the next generation through artefacts, images, stories, etc. Sometimes “symptoms” of the trauma are handed down by the parental generations to the next younger generation, and the next. Although there are shifts in this universalising tendency, the approach in the scholarship on historical trauma has been to apply this theoretical framework of inter-/transgenerational transmission of trauma to explain the enduring legacies of violence in other “post”-conflict democracies without paying attention to the complexity and chaos that has sometimes been witnessed after transitional processes despite commitment to democratic rule.

The international conference *Legacies of Violence and Trauma's Repair* in the Global South was hosted by the Centre for the Study of Violence and the Reparative Quest (AVReQ) in Kalkbay, South Africa and sought to create space for reflection on historical trauma, its continuing violent legacies, and the quest for reparative possibilities. 70 delegates from 17 countries came together for 3 days. An intimate space was created for the presentation and use of a multitude of forms of expression and representation as a way of exploring how violence and trauma continue to disrupt the present.

Call for abstracts

Over 80 abstracts were received from around the world, to the widely publicised call for papers, panels, round table discussions and other forms of creative presentations to address questions that cover, but were not limited to issues such as

- Reconstructing identities in “post”-conflict contexts.
- Challenges of working with communities facing continuing violence in “post”-conflict regions.
- What, precisely, do we mean by “testimony”? Are the terms “testimony,” “witnessing,” “bearing witness” the most useful foundational concepts for describing what survivors and their descendants mean when they invoke the oppression and suffering they endured or that endured by their forebears?
- What is the relevance of art’s interventions for a climate of legacies of violent histories and the intransigence of the past?
- Does the concept of trauma help—or hinder—our understanding of the experiences of survivors of the violence of history?
- How might art, film, and literature address the problems of violence—structural, racism, violent histories, etc.?
- How has the vocabulary of trauma shaped our understanding of the continuing legacies of oppression and racism?
- Intersection of racism, gender-based violence, and rape culture at university campuses
- Does Frantz Fanon’s legacy have a role in energising engagements with the afterlife of violent histories and contemporary cultural and historical understanding ?

PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS

Workshop 1: Researcher wellbeing

This interactive and interdisciplinary full-day workshop was co-facilitated by AVReQ PhD student Nomzamo Ntombela and Conference Programme Coordinator Friederike Bubbenzer with additional expert sessions provided by Prof Ronelle Carolissen (Psychology Department, University of Stellenbosch, and Dr Chinwe Obauku-Igwe (University of the Western Cape, South Africa). 23 participants joined this lively session.

The workshop was hosted with the dual aim of creating a space for emerging scholars to safely voice their personal experiences and concerns around researcher wellbeing and equipping them with the emotional and cognitive skills and tools to conduct research in difficult settings and on sensitive topics.

Participants included emerging Honors, Masters and PhD level students as well as civil society researchers and established academics. As part of the introduction session, participants highlighted the many challenges they had faced in conducting research. These included navigating the tension between the personal and the academic (such as integrating family narratives and histories into ones research, explaining ones research to less educated family members and exploring the trauma and silence around family and ancestral histories). The

comment by one individual that ‘my research was always going to find me’ resonated with many participants as a way of expressing how many students in the social sciences chose research topics that relate closely to their own lived realities. A number of participants expressed having experienced imposter syndrome, feeling overwhelmed by having to ‘hold’ sensitive stories, suffering from compassion fatigue as well as the emotional cost of doing their work. The particular experience of female researchers was an ongoing theme throughout the day (all but one of the participants were female) as experiences of safety, juggling family and work and negotiating issues around widespread gender based violence had a strong impact on them. Finally, the impact of privilege and intersectionality were raised as matters that had to be acknowledged and addressed both in terms of access to data as well as to the interpretation thereof. Finally, participants spoke about the lacking psycho-social and mental health support that was being provided to them by universities and teaching staff.

Time was created for presenters to offer suggestions on how to mitigate stress and vicarious trauma during the research journey. Suggestions included intentionally learning how to read sensitive materials without attaching emotions to the content, developing a clear and concise research question to help narrow the spectrum of the data and the data analysis; and to prevent the expansion of reading beyond the scope as well as setting up ‘accountability partnerships/clusters/ teams’ to build symbiotically supportive relationships amongst peers. Other suggestions included developing a self-care routine that could include journaling, conducting regular exercise, committing to a meditation practice, spending time in nature, establishing a healthy sleep routine and setting boundaries in order to build a healthy work-life balance.

While the wellbeing of research participants is generally taken into careful consideration during the research design and ethics approval stage of academic and other research, the researcher’s own emotional and psychological wellbeing is rarely if ever taken into account. To ensure that the compromised wellbeing of researchers does not affect the data, nor prevent researchers from engaging in the work long term; participants of this dynamic session called for much more attention to be paid to researcher wellbeing.

Participant feedback

In closing, participants expressed their gratitude for having had the opportunity to share their experiences with one another; a number of individuals expressed having felt alone on their research journey to date and that the pre-conference workshop had highlighted to them the universality of many of the challenges they faced. Many participants expressed a need for increased support while conducting existing and future research-both in preparing them to ethically and compassionately engage with research subjects in contexts affected by direct and structural violence as well as processing and analysing difficult primary and secondary data. During the conference days that followed, individuals approached members of the hosting

team and expressed that the pre-conference workshop had helped them in managing their own response to some of the difficult material and that they felt better prepared to return to their research in the new year.

Workshop 2: Gender Justice and Reconciliation

Led by Laurie Gaum and Desiree English, this half-day workshop was a short, experiential introduction and taste of the GERI process and methodology through personal reflection and group discussion in shortened versions of some of the key workshop processes and activities.

The GERI process was inspired by the principles of truth and reconciliation as developed in South Africa and has been implemented for over three decades for thousands of people on six continents. Guided by the twin powers of truth and love, and supported by skillful facilitation, the GERI process creates a safe forum to empower the unravelling culture of gender and sexual conditioning, initiating a whole new culture of gender relations and beloved community.

Participant feedback

Participants who attended this pre-conference workshop expressed their gratitude to the hosts for the way in which they facilitated a conversation about gender and gender relations in a way that allowed for a diversity of voices to be heard. While gently pushing towards a more tolerant, inclusive and transformative conversation, participants said they had gained new understanding and skills to talk about gender in contexts where the topic is often loaded with stereotypes and assumptions.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The three-day conference created a unique and intimate space for the coming together of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, with established scholars and practitioners. The programme was intentionally curated to ensure that the different modalities (academic papers, dance, film, poetry and dialogue) created contrasting forms of expression and to allow participants some reprieve from the intensity of much of the conference subject matter (trauma, violence etc). Deliberate effort was made to ensure that emerging and established scholars could be in conversation with one another and that participants from different countries could engage each other's presentations. Pieces of dance, performance and theatre were inserted throughout. The intergenerational and inter-disciplinary nature of the conference gave birth to a particularly vibrant and dynamic atmosphere which allowed for critical academic analysis, personal storytelling and joint reflection between people from vastly different perspectives and lived realities.

In the process of accepting abstracts and participants for the conference, the conference committee deliberately sought to ensure the inclusion of frequently marginalised voices by selecting women to dominate the speaker line-up. This ensured an even more diverse spectrum of participants and perspectives. As such, a deeper understanding of the

transgenerational legacies of historical trauma and violence- which often have been in the making for several generations- could be incorporated into a dialogue with the arts. In this way the conference sought to create opportunities for awareness and healing, and thus the promotion of social justice and social inclusion.

PARTNERSHIP

AVReQ has been collaborating with the *Imagining Futures* project at Exeter University. The goal of this project is to explore and build methodologies of egalitarian archival practice, which allow for the co-existence of multiple experiences of the past, and incorporate dialogues across generations, gender, and class. The project enacts these goals by funding various projects, producing a manifesto on egalitarian archival practices, and creating a digital repository, which will house the outputs of our projects. The project also supports the work of several MA students, based at Stellenbosch University, the University of Ghana, the University of Saint Joseph in Lebanon, and the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

The conference was attended by the following members of the Imagining Futures team: Dr Elena Isayev (IF principal investigator; Professor of Ancient History and Place; University of Exeter) , Aoife O’Leary McNeice (IF Research Fellow and MA Fellows Coordinator, University of Exeter), Professor Kodzo Gavua (Associate Professor of Archaeology and Heritage Studies and Director of the Leventis Digital Resource Centre at the University of Ghana, Nancy Rushohora (IF Co-investigator and Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies of the University of Dar es Salaam) and Dr Jihad Namur (Academic Coordinator; Arab Master’s programme in Democracy and Human Rights, University of Beirut). Five students from the programme were also invited to travel to the conference from Ghana, Tanzania, Lebanon and the UK to present their research and engage in knowledge exchange with one another and other conference delegates. These discussions will inform a major output of the project, a Manifesto on Egalitarian Archival Practices.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

VISUAL REDRESS: EXPLORING THE REPARATION OF NEGLECTED HISTORIES THROUGH ART



A captivating and stimulating opening dialogue was held between **renowned and award-winning South African artist Nandipha Mntambo** and classics scholar **Dr Samantha Masters (University of Stellenbosch)**. In this conversation, Mntambo narrated her recent work-celebration of the the Agoodjie warriors (see bronze sculpture below) of the 19th century

Dahomey Kingdom (now Benin). Her subtle but deeply considered revision of history is a performative, sculptural and photographic celebration of the Agoodjie warriors of Dahomey. The army of the rich and powerful Dahomey Kingdom constituted 12,000 troops and included a unique and highly trained corps of four thousand female warriors — the personal protectors of the kingdom’s rulers. Through Mntambo’s work, the Agoodjie are brought back to life, returning this unusual and marginalised story back into the public realm.

In conversation with **Professor Tamar Garb (Durning Lawrence Professor in History of Art, University College London, visual artist and photographer Lebohang Kganye**, detailed how she uses her family archive to explore and re-enact notions of home and belonging. Kganye often incorporates the archival and performative into a practice that centers storytelling and memory as it plays itself out in the familial experience. She is currently doing her Masters in Fine Arts at the Witwatersrand University, South Africa. Notable awards include the Grand Prix Images Vevey 2021/22, Paulo Cunha e Silva Art Prize, 2020, Camera Austria Award, 2019 and the finalist of the Rolex Mentor & Protégé Arts Initiative, 2019. Kganye’s work forms part of several private and public collections, most notably the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pennsylvania and the Walther Collection in Ulm.



Dr Uhuru Phalafala (Stellenbosch University) reading her poem ‘Mine Mine Mine’ as Nandipha Mntambo’s bronze sculpture of an Agoodjie female warrior stands watch in the background.

DIALOGUE AS REPARATIVE PRACTICE



Professor Pumla Gobodo Madikizela (AVReQ) in conversation with Judge Albie Sachs about the reparative role and power of ubuntu in contemporary South Africa



Dr Precious Simba (University of Stellenbosch, Hope Azeda (writer and performer; Rwanda), Professor Pumla Gobodo Madikizela (AVReQ) and Professor Phil Clarke (SOAS, UK), engage the audience after a dialogue on ubuntu in different African contexts

DANCE AND THEATRE-ARTICULATING THE UNSPEAKABLE THROUGH DANCE AND THEATRE

Legacies of Violence and Trauma's Repair in the Global South

Stellenbosch University

AVReQ Centre for the Study of the Afterlife of Violence and the Reparative Quest

• / *babelas* / is a dance performance and choreographic comment on the alcohol abuse and family violence common among young people in O'Kiep. The audience is invited to a post-performance discussion.

Garage

The Bible Institute, 180 Main Rd, Kalk Bay

Free Public Event | Thursday, 8 December | 16:00

BABELAS

A social commentary on stage by The Garage Dance Ensemble

Garage Dance Ensemble has been in existence since 2011, when icons of modern dance John Linden and Alfred Hinkel returned to their native soil and developed a dance community in the region. The dance performance 'babelas' is a powerful social and choreographic commentary on the root causes and wide-reaching social impact of alcohol abuse on communities in the Northern Cape in South Africa. After the 40 minute performance, conference participants were invited to a post-performance discussion with the 5 performers.



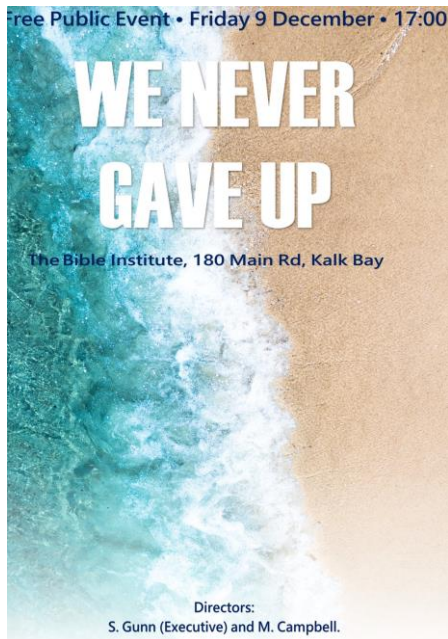
Artists from the performance 'babelas' (above) express the close interlinkage between alcohol abuse, intimate partner violence and the impact on relationships in South African communities.

AVReQ PhD student Lireko Qubela's ten-minute solo theatre and dance performance processed how stories about history and the present, come together to ignite conversations about lingering wounds and the efforts for reparation. Its purpose is to explore what it means to hold stories of violence and the ways in which the body processes the encounter. Qubela conceptualises the body as a 'story carrier', referring to those of anyone who bears witness to another's story, including their own.



Lireko Quebela's captivating performance (above) evocatively narrates-through dance, movement and the spoken word; how stories of violence are carried in the body.

FILM



The 70min 2022 documentary film *We Never Gave Up* directed by Shirley Gunn and Mark Camepll is the third film in a trilogy produced over 20 years with members of the Khulumani Western Cape on their experiences of surviving the racist apartheid regime in South Africa. The film follows the following the lives of eleven survivors human rights violations perpetrated during apartheid and who suffered various atrocities, which spans twenty years following the original subjects, and the children of those who have passed on. More than two decades into parliamentary democracy, the subjects in *We Never Gave Up* talk about their lives today, with the promise of a better tomorrow elusive.

After the screening of the film, participants engaged the producer in a vigorous conversation about the effectiveness of the South African reparations model, the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and alternative models of redress for large-scale, systemic and inter-generationally manifesting human rights violations.



Executive Producer Shirley Gunn in conversation with the audience after the screening of 'We never gave up', facilitated by Professor Phil Clarke from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)

ACADEMIC EXPLORATION



Dr Stephen David (AVReQ, Stellenbosch University) presents his paper “Now You’ll See How this Place Works”: A Fanonian Reading of Voices of Black Students at Stellenbosch University in the Video Luister.



Anell Stacey Daries (left) presents her paper ‘Transgenerational Analysis of the Rise, Development, and Socio-political Implications of Physical Education at Stellenbosch University, 1937-2019; Gratia Ilibagiza (AVReQ, Stellenbosch University) chaired the session.



Dr Nancy Rushohora (University of Dar Es Salaam) (left) talking about her work in excavating generations of memories of colonial wars in Tanzania with Dr Elena Isayev (Exeter University), both from the Imagining Futures Programme.