Memorialisation and Reconciliation in Transitional Southern African Societies

Research report written as a part of the Southern Africa Reconciliation Project by a group of social scientists from Zimbabwe. Research contributions were made by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and its partners in Angola, Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, Zimbabwe, July 2005.

Introduction

The aim of this report is to assess the role of memorialisation in the process of transition from colonial rule to independence (Namibia, Zimbabwe), from apartheid to non-racist democracy (South Africa), from colonial rule and post-colonial dictatorship (Malawi), or from colonial rule and post-colonial civil war (Mozambique) to peaceful, multiparty political contest for majority support.

We focus on questions like: Did we or did we not put the past behind us? Is there something worth the title *national reconciliation* in our countries? And, if so: How did and does memorialisation contribute to it? We also aim to understand the effects of government policies upon local and national reconciliation activities regarding memorialisation and how civil society organisations engage in this field.

Reconciliation and memorialisation are, to use the Marxist term, 'superstructure phenomena', and questions need to be asked as to their material basis. Can memorialisation lead to reconciliation, in a setting that continues to be characterised by underdevelopment and mass poverty co-existing with minority affluence? Are the change in the skin colour of the affluent minority and the overthrow of the colonial or post-colonial political systems indicators of ongoing transitional processes at the material basis of society? If crass inequality, racism and tribalism are still with us, should this simply be called a "colonial legacy"? Or hides behind this label an attempt to avoid facing a disconcerting continuity in the functioning of pre- and post- "transitional" societies under the auspices of a capitalist global economy?[1] And if so, how are memorialisation processes affected by this? Can memorialisation, under such conditions, really promote reconciliation?

Other questions are: How do African culture and tradition conceptualise memorialisation? Can they be practised in relative independence of the economic framework referred to above, and to which effect?

One may try to assess at many levels of analysis – economic, social, political, and cultural – whether we have truly put a bad past behind us, whether it is factually still with us, or if it is only haunting us. Looking at the payment of reparations, at victim support services, and at the reintegration of ex-combatants may give us some insight into what has or has not been achieved economically, socially and politically. By comparison, the handling of memories rather tells us much about intentions:

- Is governments' so-called policy of "national reconciliation" a genuine attempt to come to terms with the past and heal the wounds it left, or
- is it just a smokescreen behind which other agendas try to hide?

Related to intentions are questions of an ethical nature: are there *just* ways of coming to terms with an *unjust* past? When can efforts to achieve reconciliation be regarded as genuine? Are there necessary conditions, like

- confession, contrition, purpose of amendment, and penance on the perpetrator's side, and
- compensation to the extent possible, for the victims?

Is reconciliation a must, or do victims have a right to seek revenge within the framework provided by the law? What is it that victims and perpetrators, people at grassroots level and those in power, governments and civil society organisations, tell us about all this through their memories, those purposefully kept alive, those actively suppressed, and those forgotten for sheer lack of interest? These are questions we should like to address in our analysis of interview transcripts on memorialisation from five African countries.

Memorialisation is about all kinds of activities, and the possible material output of these, that aim at keeping up or restoring the memory related to something past. Deliberate memorialisation activities are public gatherings to commemorate the struggle for independence, church services, funerals, exhumations and reburials for those who died in this struggle, etc. They might take place at a date the organisers or participants deem appropriate, or be organised to occur at the same date every year (e.g., heroes' day); the organisers may be individuals, civic groups, political parties, churches or the state. The output may be a monument, a grave, a headstone at a gravesite, a shrine, or a building or street named after an individual.

Memorialisation can take the form of communities reclaiming a denied historical past at a local level, including reclaiming their denied dead. In Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, processes around exhumations and reburials involved communities memorialising their murdered relatives and reclaiming the truth of the past, at the same time. This was an informal community-driven process, although such activities can also take place as a formal, widely acknowledged and government-driven process.

Our study was planned and carried through against this background of questions and observations. While we acknowledge the contribution of the creative arts and education to memorialisation, this aspect in the end did not play any major role in the interviews that form the basis of this paper.

Methodology

Qualitative interviews were conducted in Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, to compare experiences across these countries, regarding three questions:

1. How is the memory of the struggle for self-determination kept alive?
2. Who in the public domain (survivors of TOV, relatives of victims, ex-combatants, traditional leaders, politicians, etc.) is active in memorialising, and for which declared or undeclared purposes are such activities undertaken (e.g., what do politicians claim with regard to memorialisation, and what is other interviewees' assessment of such claims)?

3. Which memorialisation processes, if any, are perceived as healing or reconciling?

The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions that were translated if needed, and adapted to probe the content knowledge of three different sample groups:

- chiefs, traditional healers, and anthropologists;
- political scientists, politicians, and human rights activists; and
- grassroots victims/survivors of the struggle for transition.

This report is based on interviews that were tape recorded with permission, translated where necessary, and transcribed before analysis. While it was envisaged that a total of between 12 and 16 interviewees per country would come from all three groups, the eventual groups of interviewees were not as representative as anticipated. In the end, only the second group was interviewed in all its subgroups, in four of the five partner countries.[2] Of the first group, all three subgroups were contacted in Zimbabwe; in no other country was a traditional healer interviewed, in South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique, chiefs were not interviewed either. Thus, interviews with the first group were with its Western-trained academic component, anthropologists, only, in three of five countries, which makes it rather too similar to the second, where political scientists represent another part of academe. The third group is represented in transcripts from Malawi, Namibia and Zimbabwe, but not from Mozambique and South Africa.

Altogether, this creates a bias away from traditional worldviews, and away from the views of "ordinary" people, towards the perceptions and convictions of politicians, academics, and human rights activists.

Memorialisation in the transitional process Government, CSO and community initiatives Reactions by the general public and by victims in particular

Transcript analysis was undertaken according to themes that came up in all or at least most countries, and it is one of our major findings that differences between countries, in spite of their markedly diverse historical and economic development, appear peripheral when compared to a solid core of shared views. However, even interviewees from the same country could argue in favour of the same idea, yet differ as to its actual status. For example, is an event like heroes' day owned by the people of Namibia or by SWAPO? Survivors and government officials agreed that people *should* own the process, but differed as to whether they actually *did*.

Our project aimed at developing a genuine understanding of different views of memorialisation, but this proved not possible. Whilst politicians in opposition were keen to speak out, authoritative government views were difficult to come by in all countries except Mozambique. Those who hold power were difficult to approach. The government version of memorialisation is thus portrayed mostly by non-government voices who, in their majority, judge devastatingly about it: there is little worth speaking of – a few monuments and national holidays – and the little that is, serves only one party political end, namely, the justification of the powers that be.[3] One is tempted to interpret the reluctance to speak, of government representatives who would have good reason to try to paint a different picture, as their way of admitting the truth of this verdict.

Civil society is declared to be important by many, not for what it actually does or has done around memorialisation, but for what it *should* do. However, as a sign of its essential weakness it seems unable to overcome the obstacles ruling parties put in its way. To a large extent, therefore, the following analysis of interview transcripts is about two issues:

- abuse of memorialisation by those in power, as perceived by their critics; and
- the memories of those who were not compensated for their losses, who find themselves cheated of the fruits of the struggle and who, through keeping their memories alive, refuse to let their demands be silenced.

The context of memorialisation

The following section focuses on the *context* within which memorialisation occurs. In doing so, we follow the lead of many interviewees who considered memorialisation as an initiative on its own as insufficient and mentioned a number of contextual conditions without which isolated memorialisation endeavours would remain token procedures:

- material reparations, as individual payments to survivors or as development of regions where people have suffered particularly badly;
- "real change" as anticipated during the struggle: equality of citizens before the law in a non-racist, non-tribalist society; freedom of expression without fear; freedom to disagree with the government; economic empowerment of the previously marginalised, etc.; and
- confession of guilt, contrition, purpose of amendment and penance by perpetrators, particularly if they still hold positions of power or if victims consider(ed) them to be "on our side".

Whether 'real change' has come about or not, is a question with an obvious bearing on memorialisation. It will be important, in this context, to take note of the social and political standing of speakers – did or did they not benefit personally from transitional processes?[4]

1. Material reparations

Many interviewees emphasised that memorialisation efforts should be directly linked to material compensation: as regional development, as individual payments to survivors, or both. Only if the socio-economic conditions of survivors improved could memorialisation initiatives be fully appreciated:

> In other words, it's all well and good to take John Vorster bridge and rename it the Steve Biko bridge, right? We will put up a statue and something else the other week, but if there's no houses built in that week then it's only a matter of time before that programme collapses. (SA; chairperson of Steve Biko Foundation)

> All we can think about is what we can do day by day to survive. All we can think about is something to help our children. I have suffered, and I do not want my children to suffer the way I did. (Mal; ex-freedom fighter against Banda)

2. Changes that were expected as a result of the struggle

To make memorialisation a worthwhile exercise, those who remember need to perceive some sort of benefit in it: pride or pleasure because their efforts came to fruition, the confidence that a wrong has been rectified. In this respect, many interviewees gave bleak accounts, whilst others showed their satisfaction. The political background of interviewees, their place in post-transition society, appeared to be a vital parameter in this respect:

> [B]efore we were not Mozambicans, we were dogs, slaves … [T]he … struggle for national liberation was aimed at freeing the land and the human beings … Let me underline that the objective of the struggle was … to attain … national independence. (MP and speaker for FRELIMO in parliament)

Out of satisfaction with the success of the struggle, some take a straight line from "the past is over" to "there is no need to dwell on bad things past" to "let's reconcile, forget and make a living today", as in the following statement:

> We are reconciled with what happened because of what those ruling now are doing. We have freedom of movement, the government is building houses for people, and the government is respecting the rights of individuals that the previous regime took away. (Mal; chief 1)

This, by contrast, is how the situation is seen by government critics:

> [T]he change was more or less symbolic. … Of course … it was evident after the first year of independence that the real motive of people who were taking over from the white man was not really to bring liberty but to be bosses over their people when the white man leaves. (Mal; chief 2)

Those in opposition and a majority of grassroots level interviewees insisted that for them, close to nothing had materialised in post-'transition' society. Their sobering assessment results in a rejection of the government version of memorialisation which consists in celebrating what supposedly has been achieved:

> I have heard people … over and over again saying we haven't benefited anything from local or black rule, and some even say the colonial days were better. … So I don't think independence is anything that people find worth celebrating now. … The big question is …, African martyr, what did you die for? People had so much expectation about … becom[ing] independent, and when the white man goes we're going to be this and that. But the reality is that those things did not come by. The only way that celebrations are going to make sense is when independence brings change to their lives, personal well being. And that's what people were fighting for anyway, that they would share the national cake. This has not come by, hence there is nothing to celebrate. (Mal; chief 2)

> [I]f you died for a cause and that cause is not realised, there is no meaning of celebrations. I don't say we should go back to the colonial days, but leadership at all times should endeavour to see that things are improving. (Mal; human

rights activist)

From such a perspective, memorialisation becomes a way of keeping alive the spirit of the struggle. Many victims of the old order perceive themselves victimised once again by the new one. They see good reason to suspect that those who are in power now, have no real interest in keeping as yet unfulfilled promises at the top of the political agenda.

> [Their a]genda? Ah! It is to consolidate their power, because there isn't much that is really achieved. Kamuzu [talked] always about himself and how he got rid of the colonial government. Muluzi talks about how he got rid of Kamuzu. I don't know what the next one is going to say. No difference. (Mal; human rights activist)

3. Our past as our present

Part I: fear and silence

For many interviewees, the ideals of the struggle for freedom have remained an aspiration that has not as yet been realised. But if things did not get better, then they are still as bad as they were: our present is no better than our past.

One of the worst implications of this reverberates in the "heroes have become perpetrators"-statement. Many interviewees spoke of their fear and silence both in the past and in the present:

> People disappeared … during the colonial days and a lot more disappeared after independence, and I believe people are still disappearing. (Mal; human rights activist)

> [Pupils] tend to be silent about a lot of things for fear of maybe inviting trouble … If the books are silent about [Gukurahundi[5]], the children are not going to be free to ask about such things in public … [We teachers] have decided to remain silent about [Gukurahundi], because you never know … whose children you are teaching. So it becomes very dangerous for you … [if] this is what the ministry says, but you have taught something else. (Zim; headmaster of primary school in Matabeleland)

> [T]he silence of SWAPO … makes me feel uncomfortable. I just have this fear that something like that might happen again … [W]e still meet these people who were responsible for the torture. I even … asked them why they did that to me. Their answer is simple – they were instructed by the leadership. And I don't really blame them because if they … [had] refused they could also have ended up in the dungeons. (Nam; ex-SWAPO detainee who wants to remain anonymous)

As an indicator of a political climate that continues to be characterised by oppression and fear, many refused to be interviewed. The director of the Namibian Monument Council, when asked about the criteria to be used to determine who should be buried at heroes' acre, replied:

> I don't think I'm presently in the position to talk about these things. The issues you mentioned … are all politically sensitive and … I'm not the person to express myself on such issues.

Part II: racism and tribalism

Racism and tribalism, and the political mileage gained out of them, receive attention mainly in Namibia, but also in Zimbabwe and South Africa:

> Whites are sometimes called settlers or boers while they are … citizens … [T]hese are things that handicap the process of reconciliation. We still find an element of racism in this country – because of racism it is difficult to talk … reconciliation. (Nam; president of SWANU [South West Africa National Union])

> [O]ur politics today is ethnically motivated. It is like when you are a certain group you automatically belong to a certain political party. And, if an event is organised by a certain group then other groups don't feel like getting involved. … So, because of politics organised along ethnicity lines, … not everybody who suffered is being remembered. The current state of affairs is not conducive for reconciliation. (Nam; retired politician and historian)

> So … reconciliation … did not come. If maybe it did it was … between the whites and the blacks, but now we need a lot of reconciliation among the blacks themselves and along tribal lines. (Zim; headmaster of a primary school in Matabeleland)

Part III: disrespect of human life and dignity

For many interviewees, the post-liberation environment retains features of pre-liberation oppression, and the ideals of the liberation struggle remain a distant dream. There is not just lack of freedom to critically engage the state, but in many instances direct intimidation, threats, and fear for life. There is a widespread feeling that even *supporters* of post-"transitional" governments are abused – used when needed, then cast aside and forgotten.

> [P]eople were killed within … FRELIMO itself, due to infighting for power, and also within RENAMO … People had enough time to eliminate all witnesses, and to present themselves in a united organisation without opposition. And if such opposition existed, [it] was eliminated in the course of the conflicts. (Moz; editor of weekly newspaper)

> [F]orty years after independence, we are still … talking [of] corruption, police brutality which the colonialists did, so we are talking of the very same things that the white man used to do. This is twice pain. It is better for the white man to inflict this pain on us rather than our fellow kinsman. (Mal; chief 2)

> Mugabe and Nkomo … were using youngsters to their advantage to get into power, and for many of those youngsters, their lot did not improve after they

got into power. (Zim; Catholic bishop)

Beyond the killing of opponents, and the functionalising of supporters as a means to party-political ends, the many who never decided to join active fighting, not even as 'simple soldiers', appear as having gotten caught between the millstones of others' agendas, thus missing their goal to just stay out of trouble:

> [B]oth parts did those killings … in such a barbaric and brutal way … [P]eople tried to have a neutral role but ended … taking sides, … hav[ing] to t ake refuge on one side to be able to run away from this barbaric situation. (Moz; human rights activist 2)

As a result, many have distanced themselves from a liberation politics that is without respect for human life and dignity:

> I admired [them] before independence, but today I don't know how I feel about these people. I don't see them as heroes any longer. For me the survivors and victims are the people to be remembered, … not those who victimised them. How can you be honoured if you tortured people and put them in dungeons? (Nam; ex-SWAPO supporter who wants to remain anonymous)

> [O]ne thing that I know for sure is that people know that the struggle was not worth the struggle. … [E]ven the celebrations are hijacked so that it should appear that it is the current politicians who are the heroes, making the real heroes … a mere platform for them to launch their popularity. (Mal; chief 2)

One way to deny the continuity between past and present: Forgetting

If so much of our present is a continuation of the past, then talking about "old" wounds often means talking about wounds that are still festering. Political and ethnic discrimination, denied opportunities, fear for one's job or freedom or even life, are not just bad memories. For many such issues are a sad reality of their post-'transitional' lives. They feel that the talk about the old wounds that should not be re-opened is informed by bad faith and by the wish to cover up, not only for a bad past, but also for a bad present.

> Sam Nujoma … came up with national reconciliation to cover or to bury the aspect of SWAPO ex-detainees, not to reveal what actually happened. … [T]he processes of remembering can be healing or reconciling … but [it] … depends on how the activities are organised. (Nam; president of SWANU)

> We do not need to keep on remembering how the former fighters killed those people they called sell-outs. In fact we had forgotten about it, but because these days they have started this violence and killing of people who belong to the opposition parties, we are reminded again. … The [present day] issue of people being killed because of their belonging to other parties opens old wounds (Zim; headman)

Remembering

Moving from *contexts* to *purposes* of remembering, one frequently given answer is in fact tautological: the purpose is not to forget.

> [T]he purpose of memorialisation is to remind people of what happened. (Mal ; ex-freedom fighter against Banda and ex-detainee)

> [I]t is relevant for the future generation to be taught about the past in order to pass it on from generation to generation. (Nam; president of SWANU)

But there are other reasons:

> Some remember the past to remember the good old days, others remember the past to inspire themselves for the future, others remember the past to feel proud and mark their places, i.e. to make themselves known in the society. (Moz; director of non-party-aligned theological seminary)

What is a truthful memory?

Before we can discuss the material content of what our interviewees said they deemed worth to be remembered, we need to address a formal issue: the truthfulness of memories, because even when the possibility of distortions is acknowledged, there is a widely held conviction that on principle, there is such a thing as "the true story":

> [E]vents should be reflected carefully as they were. If not reflecting the correct version of past events, then forget about reconciliation. (Nam; community activist)

> Efforts should be made to publish an accurate record of Malawi's history. The current history has been written by Europeans – and they have a somewhat warped perception of Malawi's history. (Mal; political scientist and historian)

> [P]eople should be taught the true history of this country, without changing it, without trying to rectify where we think … things were not supposed to be as they were. … It is Zimbabwe that won the war, not a certain clique of people, and that causes a lot of problems and it's not true history. History must be told as it is … (Zim; ex-freedom fighter; human rights activist)

> The … history of liberation … has been very politicised, it was linked to [the] one-party-system context, but in my opinion it must be given to academics, so that they can use the existing material as well as other sources … in order to compile the various perspectives. (Moz; human rights activist 2)

Among these quotations whose topic is history in a more general sense, even the shorter ones barely manage not to undermine, themselves, the idea of a "true" version of history. With every additional word, sentence, example, or explanation, a process sets in which eventually can only end in the self-destruction of the initial concept. As a first step, the "true" story is set apart from warped perceptions and partisan standards. Next, it is claimed

that the remedy against distortions due to interests of protagonists lies in listening to men of good faith, and without such partisan standards. Not surprisingly, it becomes apparent in the end that of all possible versions of the past, interviewees consistently see their *own* as linked to non-partisan truth, whilst their opponents, knowingly or not, supposedly promote one or the other kind of revisionism. This is exemplified by the interviewees' definition of heroes.

Defining "heroes"

For many interviewees, the general definition of a hero sounds neutral enough, in line with the "non-partisan" understanding of history given above.

> [A] hero must be a person [who] goes beyond any defined period – timeless, a person that existed … physically in a given period … [of] time … [when he] did extraordinary things, but continues to exist in the remaining of the history. (Moz; editor of weekly newspaper)

However, once names are attached to the concept, only the respective interviewee's heroes remain as the genuine ones:

> [T]here are some individuals who I personally think … deserve to be remembered. But the SWAPO government promote[s] and remember[s] only those whom they feel should be remembered. (Nam; survivor and human rights activist)

> [T]he national liberation … [heroes are] not the only ones that carried out the struggle. We should also praise those who died in the struggle for the country's democracy … I [am] talking about Andre Matsangaissa who is a person who should be included in the group of the country's heroes. (MP for RENAMO 2)

> I do not recognise Andre Matsangaissa as national hero … [He was] … against the objectives … to free the land and the human being. (MP and speaker of FRELIMO in parliament)

A Mozambican human rights activist can sum this up by saying:

> [Andre Matsangaissa] … is RENAMO's hero in the same way that FRELIMO has heroes that are not national heroes. … I think there is manipulation in the present context, whereby the hero is emphasised only by one political party, the government … [T]his is manipulation because other political parties hardly can participate in this process …

Only as a minority view is the idea put forward that interpretations of the past change, with each version making sense at its time and from the viewpoint of the speaker:

> [It] is difficult to decide who a hero is. Perpetrators might be heroes in some people's eyes. … So those who tortured us might be heroes for some people. (Nam; survivor and human rights activist)

> [It] is urgent, not to rewrite … history, but to be able to … accommodate various perspectives of interpretation of … history … If you do not agree with … [an] interpretation, establish yours …, give your perspective … This indeed is needed in our context. … [T]he big challenge … today is how we can have a history of liberation that is contextualised in the multiparty system context. (Moz; human rights activist 2)

Deliberate lies

To avoid a possible misunderstanding – that in our view it was entirely up to people to 'construct' history as they pleased – we would like to briefly address a topic related to truthfulness: that of deliberate lies. Different interpretations can make sense of the past, but when we choose and construct our identity around one particular reading of what happened, there will always remain incompatible material that has to be dealt with: either by omission and denial, or by "fictionalised accounts" (see following page) and outright lies. Reliance on these means to a larger or lesser degree, but most of all the struggle to prevail between the protagonists of competing versions of history, will affect the viability of interpretations in the long run:

> I was a history teacher immediately after independence, and there was an official version. … [W]e had to tell the kids that this is how you write an exam, but we all knew that this was not what happened, so there is that level of memorialisation through official teaching of children. (Zim; human rights activist and widow of national hero)

> [T]o know our past … is difficult because government would like to remove the memory of Dr. Banda completely … and replace him with Chilembwe. … [A]fter removing … Kamuzu Day, Chilembwe Day has now become the national day. (Mal; human rights activist)

The national struggle against repression, and personal identity

It transpires from many of our interviewees' statements that we are our memories, in that they constitute our identity:

> To remember on the one hand … is a way of recognition of … what was done, [and] for what [it] was done. On the other hand, … through remembering those actions in those days … we are giving relevance and … purpose [to] the history … of this country. We identify ourselves with history. (Moz; anthropologist)

> [W]e think about memorials as having to do with the past. If they are worthwhile, … they must refer to the future, not the past. In other words, they must create some sort of identity, which will carry on, perhaps based in … [an] often fictionalised account of the past, but they must … look towards the future. … I think one way, one direction that could take [is t]o interpret … or re-interpret the struggle as a struggle for an African identity … rather than a struggle against apartheid that is against just an administrative system or a political system. (SA; anthropologist)

For survivors of liberation struggles, especially, memory is central to their identity. Many who still demand to have their share of what was fought for, need to keep up their victim cum fighter-for-transition identity through memory, because their claims go with it:

> [M]aybe one day I will be allowed to play a role, because I find that since the days of the liberation struggle, I have been denied that opportunity to do something for this nation. (Zim; ex-freedom fighter; human rights activist)

> [I]t is necessary to remember the … sacrifices … people made so that they can be assisted by the government, [p]articularly in the case of ex-combatants. (Mal; ex-freedom fighter against Banda)

The feeling of having been forgotten, and thus having one's identity taken away, becomes particularly painful when it takes the form of lack of acknowledgement by the leadership of the former liberation movement itself:

> [T]here isn't acknowledgement. … I have had … [an] education, and so I'm able to talk on my own behalf. But … there are … hundreds of other people who do not have those faculties, simply because … history has denied them that. So I keep on asking myself the question: If I am so vocal and I'm not being heard, then what about those people …?

[L]ook for example at the Amandla cultural [group] who were our ambassadors in the international arena, in popularising the South African struggle internationally … Many of them … have resorted to alcohol and substance abuse because there has been no recognition, there's been no acknowledgement of their contribution to the struggle … And so in a sense it almost felt like they've served their purpose. (SA; human rights activist and ex-exile)

National identity: selective memory in the service of national unity

Some interviewees perceive the differences of interest between opposing actors on the political scene with great clarity and are usually very critical of governments for their deliberate confusion of ruling party and national affairs:

> [T]here is I think a tendency to see government initiatives as ANC initiatives … [a] constant confusion of political parties and government, which is partly deliberate, but that I think … has to be guarded against. (SA; anthropologist).

However, most interviewees are prepared to forget all conflicts of interest once the focus is upon national identity and particularly on national *unity*. On such occasions, even government critics join the chorus of government employee and middle-class non-government voices that see the importance of memorialisation related to issues of nationhood.

> Unless a nation has a symbol, a guiding star, that nation is like sheep without a leader. … And that is … [of] which we remind yourselves when memorialising events, we keep alive that memory and honour the sacrifice and contributions made by those before us. … [The] state should try to use these events as

> opportunities to bring about unity and harmony among Namibians. (Nam; president of DTA)

All critique of the government seems forgotten. Appeals are made to see the nation as a family with a father-president, and conflicts are treated as something that just should not be:

> [T]he biggest pride that any citizen has is the Mozambican citizenship, is the Mozambican nationality. (Moz; president of PIMO)

> Public acts of remembering should not only belong to the ruling party – but should be a large national celebration – like Christmas or Mother's Day. … The day of Banda's death should be honoured, so that people remember what he did to [sic!] Malawi. … The good things as well as the mistakes must be remembered. In the case of mistakes, people must be willing to reconcile and forget about it and come up as one people, one family. (Mal; employee at National Museum)

> If there are people who have done something worth remembering, it must be remembered. Differing in views between political parties is what is destroying this. If one party wins it ignores the other camp. But we are one and should be aiming at achieving one thing. (Mal; government official)

Unity in diversity

In contrast to unabashed requests to ignore the evils of the past (and present) in the name of nationhood, and to attempts at glossing things over even if this means to deny one's own suffering, some maintain a critical distance:

> [W]e need to understand each other and live together in … diversity, … be able to understand that this person thinks bad of me but we are in the same planet … [S]o we can meet and go forward, each one with his thinking – … it is normal for a multi-cultural society to have differences of opinion. (Moz; MP for RENAMO 2)

> I think reconciliation will come … [once] we say all of us with our differences, … ideological, political or otherwise – [let's] come together and … forge a particular nation. And even if it's not a nation, let's come together, let's be in peace with ourselves and let's move forward as a people. (SA; researcher at Robben Island Museum)

> Democracy means being able to accept that someone is different and has different ideas. We still cling to the language of the old days, that if someone says something different, they have been 'bought'. (Mal; political scientist and historian)

Is reconciliation a must?

Much has already been said in passing about the need to forgive, about the need to forget,

and the need to get on with life. But is reconciliation really a must, considering that some people argue for the right to differ? Some interviewees are brave enough to cast a critical look at the absolute obligation to reconcile:

> I do not want to reconcile, … I think reconciliation is possible, but the mother of reconciliation is honesty, it begins there and ends there. (Zim; playwright)

So memorialisation does not necessarily lead to reconciliation. Can one then at least say that by remembering the past, we shall avoid repeating our mistakes?

Memorialisation as a safeguard against repeating old mistakes

In view of clear links between what is recalled of the past, and the present day interests these memories (or their denial) are meant to serve, remarks appear rather naïve which claim that memorialisation of the past, *as such*, can keep us from repeating old mistakes:

> [W]e committed mistakes, we are all human beings so we have to remember the past so that the mistakes done in the past are not again committed in the future. (Moz; human rights activist 2)

> [V]ictims should definitely be remembered because they were innocent people and by remembering them we can avoid a repetition of what happened. (Nam; survivor and human rights activist)

This is altogether different from spelling out one necessary, though by no means sufficient condition for not repeating old mistakes, namely, knowledge of what went wrong in the past:

> [H]istory helps us to know and understand the past, and understanding the past helps you to understand the present situation. In fact the present is a result of what happened in the past. We don't only learn the past, but we also come to know … what caused certain events to happen. (Nam; research and publications officer at National Archives)

> [A] lot of people want to forget …, [but] I do not think that you should forget until you have dealt with it … It would be nice to be able to forget eventually, but I do not think that we should just forget bad things because we do not want to think about them: we have to interpret them. I think we need as a nation to learn from these things, and we cannot learn from them if we cannot deal with it and say why did this happen, … where did it come from? (Zim; human rights activist and widow of national hero)

The difference in content between the last two quotations and the two before may appear insignificant at first glance. However, hope that remembering the past, by itself, could safeguard against a repetition of old mistakes in the present and future implies that there is no actual need for a sober analysis of the present, so as to identify where, and to what extent, there actually was no development away from a bad past of racism, exploitation, poverty, etc. This version of memorialisation plays into the hands of those whose interest, first of all, is to maintain the status quo. Contrary to this, those who want to see change in

the present – usually claiming that what they fought for all along has as yet not materialised – are interested in memories of the past as a potential guideline to decide which course of action to take now and in the future:

> If you know … where people failed, then you could start improving on it. Say those who rose against the government, why did they fail. May be they would like to rise again now. (Mal; government official)

In this quotation, quite evidently, all hinges on an assessment of the present which sees change as desirable, and historical analysis becomes one means to this end.

Much is said publicly about achievements and progress, liberation from the colonial yoke, from apartheid, from post-colonial dictatorship, and some of it is true. We find it important to record here the other side of the coin: amazingly explicit views particularly from the grassroots which, in hindsight, sadly agree to an unexpected extent with the Belgian general quoted in footnote 1, in their verdict that "after independence" equals "before independence". Getting depressed is one possible response to this assessment; another is to continue with the struggle.

Remembering unfulfilled aspirations and acting on them as a way towards healing

Underscoring the opportunity that lies in remembering the past, some state that it can indeed play a role in healing the wounds, if the ideals that the struggle was all about are recalled, and if this leads towards initiating present day change:

> Those ideals are very important to take us forward … [T]he existing wounds can be heal[ed] with the re-reading of our struggle … [by] trying to find … ways to put … democracy in a good way of working. (Moz; director of non-party-aligned theological seminary)

> I view myself … even today as a freedom fighter, not as a former freedom fighter, because as long as there is no freedom, I'm going to be fighting, with a different weapon now of course. (Zim; ex-freedom fighter; human rights activist)

This *activist* position is in stark contrast to the above quoted chief's stance (cf. p. 6) which maintains that because of factual developments, reconciliation is a lived reality that makes the need to remember superfluous. It will be part of our discussion to relate such statements to possible hidden agendas of the speakers.

Other survivors and human rights activists pursue similar goals, although in their wording they are less radical than the one just quoted. They suggest a mix of measures, including monetary reparations, admission of guilt by perpetrators, acts of memorialisation, and space for victims to tell their story as their way towards healing. Their hope is for a world in which suffering is recognised, where perpetrators show contrition, and where steps are taken towards a real transition that makes the present differ from the past; they thus object to simplistic solutions like "develop and forget":

> [P]eople who suffered want the perpetrators to recognise that it is part of their

> memory as well …; but it has to be done genuinely, it cannot just be a token thing, … and it has to involve some kind of national reconciliation, and admission that we did something wrong. (Zim; human rights activist and widow of national hero)

> Reparation as I understand it is an attempt to acknowledge sacrifice, and reparation can, I suppose, take many forms. It can be in monetary form, it can be in symbolic form, and many, many people have indicated that we are not really interested in the money … I would like to have … the school down the road from me named after my child. Which … has a lot more intrinsic [value] for me. (SA; chairperson of Steve Biko Foundation)

It seems fair to say that victims are generally not happy with the idea that one measure will rectify everything, no matter which one is proposed. This reservation often appears as a deep-seated ambivalence: talk of reparations provokes a response like "money will not make us forget":

> [P]eople are not quantifiable, isn't it? And life, life is a good that is immeasurable in monetary terms … (Moz; human rights activist 2)

On the other hand, advocates of memorialisation are challenged with "remembering without compensation will not do!" Only rarely does one find, among victims at grassroots level, the clarity of conceptual understanding displayed by some of the interviewed academics and human rights activists, who see the necessity of both, and the inadequacy of either on its own. Usually, this assessment has to be extracted from separate claims, statements and observations remaining in unresolved contradiction to one another.

A clear renunciation of material compensation will in all likelihood come only from those who in a way got compensated already, from the politicians and other better-off victims:

> [S]ome people might want to be paid money; I personally will appreciate if SWAPO acknowledge that they treated us inhuman[ly] and if they can say, '… sorry for what we did to you' … Then justice will be done … (Nam; ex-SWAPO detainee; lecturer at the University of Namibia)

From this statement made by a Namibian academic who maybe doesn't need extra money, it obviously takes only one more step towards belittling the role material compensation can play. The then-and-now losers, however, even if they agree that money cannot buy forgetting the past, will nonetheless insist on the importance of reparations. Clearly and coherently, this was spelt out by a Zimbabwean interviewee who actually did not talk about memorialisation, but about reparations:

> The one thing that the Catholic Church got right over the years and over the ages was … [that] reconciliation in terms of the sinner and God … requires contrition - that means being sorry for what you have done; confession - that means telling the truth about what you have done; a firm purpose of amendment - that means we are not going to do it again; and penance. And those four principles … are equally important in this whole exercise. There must be

> contrition: we are sorry that we did this. … [T]his is actually what we did. Here is the historical record of what we did. We do not want to do it again, we now have democracy and it is not going to happen again. And as reparation, as penance, we are now going to do this and this and this and this and this. … I believe that those four things are important in any effort towards reconciliation … (Zim; MDC MP and ex-head of CCJP)

The sequence of events, according to this logic, is not that you forget and therefore there will be reconciliation, but rather the other way round:

> There must be reconciliation so that the people can forget and move on. (Mal; employee at National Museum)

Truth commissions

Interviewees leave no doubt that upholding the aims of the struggle includes telling the truth about what went wrong in its course. This is a vital concern of theirs, and they do not accept the opening-of-old-wounds argument as being made in good faith:

> I spent more than five years in the dungeons of Lubango, five years of humiliation, of torture and … of starvation. … [I] feel that the SWAPO leaders should tell the truth, then my heart will cool off, they should admit their mistake. As long as they remain quiet, our pain will remain. … From my side I'm really ready to reconcile but the issue should be addressed. They can't just expect me to forget and forgive … (Nam; ex-SWAPO detainee who wants to remain anonymous)

> Though this Truth and Reconciliation Commission is not in place, people are aware of the past, they know what happened …, what every one of us did in the past. … Therefore I do not go along with the thesis that says if we discuss the past we are going to divide the country … (Moz; editor of weekly newspaper)

How to deal with the disappeared and the not decently buried

1. The disappeared

Unresolved mourning

The relevance of the problem of disappeared people was not denied by any of our interviewees: they spoke of unresolved mourning, and of the need of the families of the disappeared to know. Without the knowledge if relatives are dead or alive, many families remain unable to find closure. Furthermore, many argued that it was necessary to distinguish between categories of the disappeared, i.e., those who disappeared before and those who disappeared after liberation:

> The issue of disappeared persons is like a gangrenous wound – if someone is dead, the wound caused by that loss cannot properly heal until the mourning process is complete. (Mal; survivor and opposition politician)

> [Relatives] are always very worried about … [physical] remains; and there is …

> a feeling that unless these people are laid to rest in a proper ground, they are unhappy … It is felt that this unhappiness can have a bad effect on the family. (Zim; Catholic bishop)

> While people have disappeared and … are not accounted for – forget about peace and healing. Everybody, the state and civil group[s] have a role to play … Civil societies are trying but the state is hostile. (Nam; president of SWANU)

> [Gukurahundi] has never been acknowledged as a collective national event and it needs to be. … There is no reason why we cannot have a national memorial … saying, 'This is to all the people who died or suffered during 1982 to 1986'. I think it would be wonderful if we were able to do that, then we might be able to forget once we have cleansed ourselves somehow …; but it has to be done genuinely, it cannot just be a token thing, … and it has to involve some kind of … admission that we did something wrong. (Zim; human rights activist and widow of national hero)

Ways of remembering the disappeared

Many interviewees emphasised the importance of information gathering, particularly if it was against current political obstacles. Next, they thought of holding perpetrators accountable, and of dedicating memorial services and monuments to the disappeared.

> Commemorative ceremonies for disappeared people is one thing that is missing. There are some who are in government now who were responsible for some of the disappearances, yet they have not been required to give a public account of what happened. … We are missing a lot of information about displaced and disappeared persons. … One of the problems with the disappeared people is that there is no closure – in some instances there is no body. And where there are bodies, these should be exhumed … and reburied. At least there should be a ceremony to commemorate the loss of these lives. (Mal; employee at National Museum)

> Yeah, we never cried properly about those who disappeared, we came back and struggled to continue living. The parents or family members were hopeful that they would still hear something. So we need a service to weep and mourn, maybe that will help us to make peace with their disappearance. … We need the government … to put one day aside, declare that day a public holiday in honour of these people. Another act that can be considered is, if their bones are nowhere to be found, [to] hold a symbolic reburial … [in] one big grave … That grave can be visited annually to commemorate the death or missing of these people. Or why not consider the erection of a monument in their honour? As long as SWAPO keeps quiet we will never find out the truth. (Nam; ex-SWAPO supporter who wants to remain anonymous)

In summary, interviewees demand for the disappeared virtually all that has been defined above as necessary preconditions of reconciliation: telling the truth, i.e., providing as much information as possible; an acknowledgement of guilt, i.e., an apology if the perpetrators

are still alive, especially if they are in government; reparations in every possible way: inclusion of victims in the list of heroes, monuments, a national day of remembrance, having the bones returned for a decent burial. The one issue not explicitly addressed in this context is a firm purpose of amendment, as would be evidenced by measures taken by the perpetrators to make sure such crimes cannot happen again.

2. Exhumations and reburials

The need to exhume and rebury

> [W]e have different approaches even among Christians, … [b]ut there are those … [for whom] graves are centres of inspiration where they perform … rituals and remembrances … (Moz; director of non-party-aligned theological seminary)

When talking about the disappeared, interviewees already drew a link between them and burial procedures. Hardly any of those who commented on this issue felt that forgetting about the bones was the proper strategy. Most interviewees highlighted that there was a problem that needed attention, although there were some technical problems that had to be addressed:

> [W]hen there is [a] massacre … there are many people … buried in a given zone, but we have a tradition to pay respect to our beloved dead and we can [not] live in peace if we do not exhume the bodies. Now, to what extent this is practical, … what resources are necessary …, this is very complicated. I think there is a need of specific … studies … (Moz; human rights activist who wants to remain anonymous)

> I think that any person deserves a proper treatment regardless of the side he/she belongs to, after death. … [T]he normal thing would be to identify … people … but I do not see that happening right now. But maybe if we know there is a grave … or identify one in a place, maybe one day [we can] remember that person by building a good grave. (Moz; party member of FRELIMO)

Technical problems aside, there was strong support for the idea of doing something for those who were buried improperly, in shallow or mass graves:

> The African people prize individual graves, because they can offer a traditional sacrifice on the grave; … if it is just a mass grave it means that there is no specific identity … [T]hey prefer the person should lie in his own grave and if possible amongst his own people. (Zim; Catholic bishop)

> If we … analyse in [an] African perspective, … [the] soul of someone when [it] leaves his/her body … does not disappear, it continues ranging around, and then this is what certain times we hear saying that we have seen ghosts. [W]hen a person is [in] a space … contrary to his tradition, [this] create[s] problems … [T]raditional leaders … [and] churches … can … undertake awareness building campaigns so that the entire society or … community contribute … [to] the exhumation of bodies or deceased ones or skeletons from those places. (Moz;

law student and FRELIMO party member)

> [W]e always resort to elitist solutions … instead of going to community level … to discover the solution that the people have. … The issue of graves, in zones where communities are organised, … is no longer a problem. They are regarded as a cemetery like any other …, people … organise their traditional ceremonies, invoke the spirits of the ancestors, they share traditional drink or beer, and sort out this inner conflict that they used to have. (Moz; editor of weekly newspaper)[6]

Reburials are demanded not only for the many victims known only to their family and local community, but also for prominent politicians who died in exile. Here, the problem of political mileage to be gained out of memorial processes looms large. Is it the relatives' agenda to have these remains reburied at heroes' acre, or who else's? Warning examples are at hand:

> [For] the three cabinet ministers and one member of parliament who disappeared and died under suspicious circumstances in 1983, there was … one ceremony … Unfortunately, this event was not focused on the memories of these people, but rather, was concerned with exposing the wrongdoings of the Banda regime. We have yet to put into place occasions for remembering these people in their own right. (Mal; academic historian)

One may ask a question here: How could the dead ever be remembered in their own right so long as even the living are perceived as means to ends? This brings us back to the problems discussed above: namely, that the present shares so many features with what was, as everybody seems to agree, a bad past.

The role of civil society in the context of memorialisation

It has been mentioned in passing that civil society is perceived as playing a role in memorialisation activities, and we shall now look at this role in more detail.

1. The relationship between civil society organisations and the state

It is clearly a minority view that CSOs and the state can and should work smoothly together, contributing from their respective sides towards a common goal:

> [M]emorialisation … is very important in assuring reconciliation. The state and civic societies have a big role to play. They should work together in the process of remembering. The state should not see civic groups as rivals but every country needs the existence of civic groups to back up the government. (Nam; ex-political prisoner at Robben Island)

Mostly, CSOs and state are seen as antagonistic because the state is said to perceive all independent groups, for the mere fact of their independence, with suspicion and hostility:

> The government and civic groups should work together but unfortunately they

> seem to be rivals. The state is hostile towards civil societies and boycotts all events organised by civic groups … (Nam; community activist)
>
> Civil societies are … not given a chance to be involved at all. The government doesn't respect civic groups and consider[s] them as enemies.(Nam; chief cultural officer in the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture)

From this antagonism, forced upon CSOs as it may be, and also from the weakness of political parties in opposition to the government, stems a widely held perception that CSOs should play the role of a government critic, possibly the only one there is. Statements on CSOs, although prompted by questions about memorialisation, tend to take on a general tinge: CSOs should oppose the government not only when it puts forward a distorted account of the past; very much more inclusively, they should oppose because no one else does.

2. The role of civil society organisations in memorialisation

Below this level of keeping government or "the politicians" in check, however, there are tasks related specifically to memorialisation, where interviewees felt that CSOs had a role to play:

> [Civil society] can help people who want to revive their culture and preserve it …, e.g., if I want to protect a relative's grave where there are mass graves, people should be helped with cement so that the grave is protected … (Zim; headman)
>
> [T]hese organisations are playing an important role [:] … they push and put some pressure on the government. At least they can speak out, and for us survivors, … the NSHR [National Society for Human Rights] and BWS [Breaking the Wall of Silence] … carry our interests. (Nam; survivor and human rights activist)
>
> [C]ivic groups have an important role to play in terms of presenting a version of the past which may be different from what the government is promoting. (Mal; political scientist and historian)

For civil society to be able to fulfil its role as a corrective to government distortions about the past, interviewees want to see it collecting and disseminating information that would influence what and how we memorialise:

> [It] is very important … that our children will not learn the history according to the convenience of the government in power … [T]his responsibility is up to … civil society, … [to] do investigative journalism, you go places where massacres took place, … locate the tombs of the beloved ones who were buried under cover, bring all this information to [the] public so that … [it] can be reconcilable and forgivable. (Moz; president of PIMO)
>
> For me, civil society … has the role to analyse and to criticise …, as well as to propose alternatives … There are issues that cannot be satisfied through the

> government, academics or political parties … In the process of preparing … history, the civil society can have a role to play. (Moz; human rights activist 2)

> Civil society groups have a crucial role to play in giving education to the rural masses: they have to go out and tell people about what happened, and solicit comments about how we should build the future. (Mal; employee at National Museum)

3. A caveat and a perspective

To end this paragraph on the role of civil society, we should like to quote one interviewee's critical comment about the hidden agenda of CSOs:

> [T]he problem is, … some … have what is called hidden agenda, and when [they] start a project they start with [an] imposition. … What is needed is [a] needs assessment, to know what exists, and based on that to do something … [W]hen we say civil society, the role of community leaders is quite often forgotten, and we can start from there. … [W]e must take advantage of their experience to move forward. (Moz; human rights activist who wants to remain anonymous)

Having said this, we should like to end this section with another Mozambican human rights activist's vision of a way forward for his country: CSOs should be instrumental in implementing a Truth and Reconciliation process. Many interviewees from Malawi, Namibia and Zimbabwe shared this view:

> The process of alleviating someone from this burden is also part of reconciliation. As we manage to listen … we also manage to forgive. … [B]ring[ing] this experience to our context of national reconciliation, … I think it would be applicable … what was done in [the] RSA. This task was attributed … not to politicians, not to the government, no. It was attributed to [the] church, … all religious [groups] were represented in the TRC and played this role. … I think … we as civil society … could do it.

Properties of genuine acts and symbols of memorialisation

> Remembering takes different forms. Renaming of streets, health centres, schools or any buildings or centres. The erection of monuments and statues are another form. We have songs sung by Jackson Kaujeua and Ras Sheehama for example. Remembering in the form of annual commemorations, … the recently inaugurated heroes' acre. (Nam; president of SWANU)

In this section, we list a number of conditions that interviewees felt acts of memorialisation had to meet.

1. Accessibility

Places of memorialisation need to be physically accessible, and people must b able to relate to them:

> [I]t's probably not worthwhile to put a memorial out in the bush … I think it should be integrated into … normal places of meeting, possibly community centres, centres in towns.[7] … [W]hat's very important is that the memorials must tie into social life. They … have to be something which you can relate to on a personal level without creating the idea that that's a memorial for somebody else, it's not me. (SA; anthropologist)

> South Africa's Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned – this is now a museum, commemorating the struggle of those who were jailed there. … [It] is a very small place, but it has been made big because of its history. Many visitors to South Africa want to go to Robben Island to see where Mandela was sleeping, the plate off which he was eating, the blanket with which he was covering his body. (Mal; employee at National Museum)

2. Ownership

Memorialisation activities need to be owned by local communities, by the relatives of victims or heroes, or by the entire nation:

> [C]ommunities are not homogeneous; … even within the same community, you're dealing with conflicting interests and you need to say "there is this idea" and people need to debate and discuss the idea and take it forward. So … as municipalities, as local …, as provincial …, as national government, you need to be a facilitator and provide support to the community. So that the community can believe they have ownership. (SA ; researcher at Robben Island Museum)

> [T]here are groups who are active in the process of memorialising, but these do not take place on a national level. It is more on an ethnic basis, like [the] Hereros remembering their own fallen heroes. (Nam; chief cultural officer in the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture)

The expression, "their own … heroes" brings us back to an issue discussed before under the heading of the truthfulness of differing historical accounts of the struggle. We said there that "of all possible versions of the past, interviewees consistently see their *own* as linked to non-partisan truth". (see p. 11) Here, we look at this topic from a slightly different angle: how are controversies over the 'true' history of the struggle linked to the ownership of acts and symbols of memorialisation? In trying to answer this question, we shall once again employ the example of heroes and their identification, as a focal point around which different versions of history have crystallised.

> [If] political leadership reserves [to] themselves to define who is the hero, who is not, without having consultation with the grassroots levels, the population cannot feel to be owner of the process. (Moz; editor of weekly newspaper)

Usurping the decision-making process is thus a first step which leads to an outcome that is either denied or deplored:

- the installation, through public acts and symbols, of one version of history as the

national one (whilst efforts are made at the same time to hide the underlying partisan interests), and

- the marginalisation of those who officially are supposed to (also) own a place, an event, etc.:

  Sithole started the struggle before Mugabe even joined politics. It is unbelievable that Sithole is not at the heroes' acre, so it's some friends that they put … [there], not heroes. (Zim; chief)

  [T]he struggle has been hijacked … by a few people who undoubtedly contributed a great deal …, but at the expense of other people, and it has been hijacked by those few in order that they can retain power today. (Zim; human rights activist, journalist)

  [D]uring the first years of independence the people was participating during the celebrations, but with time we see only ties and jackets attending such celebrations, … [when] the people who have hidden the soldier, who provided water … should be the one[s] to commemorate such dates … (Moz; party member of FRELIMO)

In this situation, where ownership of something that is publicly declared *national* has been usurped by one particular, powerful group, and people have responded by losing interest, interviewees ponder how ownership could be reclaimed by those to whom it rightfully belongs. A number of options are considered: re-defining the criteria for who is worthy to be remembered; initiating a public debate in a climate of freedom of expression; and shifting responsibility for the eventual decision making:

> The starting point probably will be the establishment of a neutral committee … [to] draw up the terms of reference: if you want to continue with the heroes' acre, what constitutes a hero in Zimbabwe? It must not be, as is the case now, a loyal ZANU/PF supporter, but it can be somebody who has made a contribution to the well-being of the people of Zimbabwe in one way or another. (Zim; ex-freedom fighter and MDC MP)

> I think this issue of hero[es] must be … extended to public debate. [What] normally appears is the decree of the president … that such a person is a hero. … For sure the president will say that he consulted some personalities, but … he only consulted FRELIMO … But … [the] state can not be … FRELIMO …, [it] must be broader. (Moz; editor of weekly newspaper)

> [P]arliament should designate the hero and not … government, because the government is always partisan … Parliament is multiparty, … in my opinion it would be an ideal place to designate someone as a hero … (Moz; human rights activist 2)

It may have become apparent by now that only for reasons of presentation, the topic of historical truth was addressed much earlier than ownership issues. From the viewpoint of their relatedness, these topics belong intimately together. As a result of ownership of

decision-making processes (like with the ruling parties in the examples given above), a particular version of history is declared to be true; however, those who are critical of ruling parties but do not wield power, may stubbornly defend what they hold to be true against the version put forward by officialdom, and deduce from their truths a right to ownership of acts or symbols of memorialisation which they are actually denied, for the time being. The battles fought around truth and ownership issues underline, in any case, the relevance of memorialisation in the political arena. Actors on all sides have taken note of the Orwellian insight that "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past".[8]

All that has been said above about the role of civil society organisations around memorialisation applies in this context: CSOs are perceived as having a vital role in reclaiming ownership of memorialisation activities from those who usurped them:

> Heroes can not be assessed by party people … This responsibility should be given to … civil society; it should be the public, the people should have a say on who is and who should not be a hero … In order to decide on a hero [there] should be something of [a] public debate. (Moz; president of PIMO)

In some transcripts, this demand for public debate stands without mediation next to the hope in mere institutional changes. It does not become clear whether these interviewees are aware that the two positions are difficult to reconcile. Little is said about how to deal, in the political reality of our countries, with the contradiction between:

- the hope in changed institutions (presumably still manned by the same ruling party), and
- demanding "freedom of expression, a free flow of information, and vigorous debate" (Zim; MDC MP and shadow minister of justice), which all amounts to a frontal attack on the ruling elite.

One possible approach has been presented already, but we must emphasise again that it is an absolute minority position:

> Our Mozambican civil society should … not be beggars of their rights …; we should turn … things upside down, the destination of the country should not be in the hands of the central committees. … [C]ivil society institutions … should define who is a hero, not the political parties. (Moz; president of PIMO)

This radical way of ranking the political class below civil society is matched by a similarly radical (and also minority) position of letting hero status emerge from a natural, uncontrolled process, thus rejecting the idea that hero status has to be assigned according to agreed-upon criteria and via formalised decision making processes:

> Heroes … [a]re idols … [F]rom our childhood we used to say 'I would like to be like this or that person'. For example, I would like to be Mandela or Eduardo Mondlane [whom], … regardless [of what] the institutionalised powers … say, … all different levels of society admire … [E]specially in the phase of youth,

> we elect someone as our idol. For example, Che Guevara died years ago, but even today there are people who use the style of his [cap] …, there are other people who have as idol Martin Luther King … (Moz; MP and speaker of FRELIMO in parliament)

Here, at least, there can be no doubt about ownership at all.

3. The formal structure of processes of memorialisation

Memorialisation needs to be integrated into rituals:

> [J]ust putting up a memorial is not enough; it needs to be … integrated into some sort of process, educational process and ritual process. (SA; anthropologist)

With this remark, we have reached the point where it becomes inevitable to talk about tradition.

Traditions

1. Tradition and modernity

The rituals people are used to are those of their traditional culture. How does memorialisation of the struggle fit in here? – We have not heard a single voice that says that 'modern' ways to remember, such as public holidays, heroes' acres and the like, are fully accepted in any of our countries. People go along with government requests, but attitudes range from passively tolerating to explicitly condemning these activities as tainted by partisan abuse, or plainly useless:

> So far the only celebrations that I have known are political ones. And well, these practices have always been alien, I don't think people understand when you say let us observe a minute [of] silence. I think the whole idea of celebration was/is political and I do not think people look … at these things with any real appreciation. … It is not a thing that people in the village have internalised and [made] … their own …, that they celebrate at their own will. It [is] really just observing the calendar, full stop. (Mal; chief 2)

There is but a tenuous link between modern and traditional activities around memorialisation:

> [T]here was never really an integrated national programme of appeasing the spirits on behalf of the war veterans. … Heroes' acre, for instance, was supposed to be a way of appeasing the spirits. … But … because of … the selection process and … because of the Marxist ideology, because it does not recognise the spiritual origins of most of the behaviour of our African people, there was bound to be distortion … (Zim; ex-freedom fighter and MDC MP)

> [Heroes' Day] is more of a Christian memorial rather than our traditional event (ukuthethela). … [O]ur traditional prayer process … [is not] a simple

> remembrance. … They should not be ashamed to ask from their ancestral spirits, not those who died during the war recently, but those who departed long back. (Zim; chief)

One link between tradition and modernity is created through the possible relevance of traditional shrines to that modern entity, the nation:

> Ancestor for the nation – maybe yes, you recall the spirit at Mashakambale shrine in Matopos, it is said to be the ancestor responsible for warfare. So that must be for the nation. Even the Njelele one is national.[9] (Zim; chief)

Traditional forms of memorialisation, far from being universally accepted among our interviewees, also meet with apprehensions or rejection. However, whilst modern forms are criticised for not being convincing to the majority of people, traditional ways are rejected, or given qualified approval only, because individual interviewees with a Western type of education prefer to distance themselves. A very few claim that once and for all they have opted out of tradition. Others create at least some distance, with either a more benign or a condescending note. On the benign side, tradition is qualified by calling it 'psychological':

> [T]he issue of traditional healers for me is … difficult … to comment on. … [I]f they help people … then it doesn't harm anybody to slaughter those goats or that cow, in order for people … to believe that they are clean and … can live comfortably with themselves; it doesn't hurt anybody … to do that, [but] it's only [in] our mind. (SA; researcher at Robben Island Museum)

On the more condescending side, we find reduction of tradition to folklore, a shallow understanding of traditional culture that reduces it to dances and puts it at one level with youth displays. This condescension does not rule out the idea of instrumentalising traditional approaches, placebo-fashion, for the benefit of the supposedly naïve believers:

> [Traditional] celebrations should be carried out; … there are cases of certain regions where there were massacres and there are things like accidents, disasters, and … the local population feels that these happened due to the lack of such ceremonies. … I think that from this cultural theory we should learn something …[:] if they feel that the ceremonies may free them from such … evils or … do away with such disasters – apparently natural! – [then] … such ceremonies should be held in all places where such things happened, apart from the commemoration events as simple recalling. (Moz; party member of FRELIMO)

Others denounce this tendency to disown local tradition and insist that behind it, there is a widespread, genuine belief that it actually works:

> [We], the Africans, black people, we believe in communicating with our ancestors, so by remembering them we show our respect and appreciation for their contribution. (Nam; retired politician and historian)

> [We] … Mozambicans … are ambivalent in accordance with what is

> convenient. When we want to show a certain appearance, we go to scientific services and we say the illness is psychiatric. … When we seriously want to sort out the problem, we follow the tradition principle and this is the reason why at all levels there are ceremonies. (Moz; human rights activist who wants to remain anonymous)
>
> [T]here were 200.000 children traumatised by war. Today nobody talks about these children, in a country where there is no psychologist, psychiatrist, … [or] specialist hospitals … [I]t seems as if those children were … integrated in the society. By whom? By local communities, by local healers, local leaders, … using local practices … The stigma of war no longer is upon those children. … [T]he community overcame the problem … using local practices. … [P]eople … organise their traditional ceremonies, invoke the spirits of the ancestors … and sort out this inner conflict that they … have. (Moz; editor of weekly newspaper)

2. The supremacy of *family* over *nation*, and the relevance of ancestral spirits in traditional thought

Are there specific features of traditional approaches towards memorialisation that distinguish them from modern ones?[10] This seems to be the case:

> [A]s we are blacks we know what remembering is: it is bringing one's spirit back to his community; when somebody is being remembered his spirit is brought back. Adequate food is prepared to eat during this chosen day. We get all the family members together and … we ask his spirit to come home … [But] our traditional prayer process … [is not] a simple remembrance. We pray for good luck and say bad luck should stay away from this family. We ask for blessings from the elders who saw it all. … They should give you life and all the good things, keep violence away from the family. (Zim; chief)
>
> These days others will end up placing flowers on the grave, but we don't do that, we give our prayers as usual, calling even to those who departed before our father and their fathers and mothers. We ask them to assist the living. Our prayers centre on asking the departed to bless the living. That the living should have respect for other people and be successful in all their endeavours. (Zim; headman)

In this light it is not surprising to hear what a Zimbabwean traditional healer and a traditional leader have to say about a feature of *real* acts of remembering:

> [R]eal remembrance means that you do things that the dead loved during his lifetime. If he liked beer, then it should be there, if he loved children, then gather many children around; it is adjusted to the individual. I do not know what happens at heroes' acre behind the cameras, but I doubt if they do it. (Zim; traditional healer)
>
> If the person was religious, then later in the day we conduct a service in respect of him/her. That is meant to fulfil his/her wishes. (Zim; headman)

All these statements emphasise that in tradition, both memory itself and acts of remembrance are very personalised. Indicators are the 'tribalistic' aspect of memory mentioned by Namibians; the wide support for the idea of bringing a family's corpses/bones back to the homestead for reburial (Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe); and the conviction that the spirits of the dead will only communicate with and have relevance to their relatives (Zimbabwe, Malawi). People keep alive the memory of departed members of their own family; it is the spirits of these people and not others who come to visit them, and acts of memorialisation are tailor-made to what the living know their departed enjoyed best.

Different from this, supra-familial issues need spiritual involvement at a higher level: when it comes to such big issues, approaching known individuals like parents or grandparents cannot suffice. In this distinction, a peculiar difference between heroes' acres and traditional shrines becomes apparent:

> This side [Njelele shrine] has got a big purpose … We visit that place in order to talk to [all] the spirits [even those who come to the place from elsewhere]; at the heroes' acre you just talk to the spirits of those who are buried there. … You see, at heroes' acre we find heroes that we buried very recently, but that side [Njelele], there are people that we are not able to identify … (Zim; traditional healer)

This is to say that at the heroes' acre, ordinary humans are addressed whom everybody knew. But when talking about the nation as a whole, spirits bigger than the one of hero Mr. So-and-so who died last year need to be asked for help; those one will not find at the heroes' acre:

> Njelele is a place of the spirits, unlike the heroes' acre which is a graveyard. (Zim; survivor)

3. Spirits of individual heroes versus the ancestral spirit world

From this assessment results the traditional healer's sophisticated attribution of relevance to heroes' acres and traditional shrines:

> There are a number of things that we do [when we visit the Njelele shrine] … We ask from the spirits that guided those people during the war until they brought independence, but at the same time we ask those spirits [in a more general way] to bless the living, because that is where we are given the rains and everything. Should there be diseases we go and report to them, in fact we talk about all these problems so that a solution can be found. (Zim; traditional healer)

In this context, memorialising is not an isolated thing. Going to the shrine has more purposes than just remembering, and it is not about remembering individuals and about indulging in the remembrance of past successes. This is why, when it comes to individuals and to forgetting, traditional interviewees are very clear:

> [Our] memorials are not specific for one individual but … [are] meant for the ancestral spirits as a whole [ukuthethela]. It is a ceremony to invite the spirits to

> stay next to you and guide you. That is our form of prayers, the term 'memorial' applies to Christians, not to a traditional people. (Zim; chief)
>
> We should remember the unpleasant things so that we correct it in future. Those things should not happen again, so we should learn from those mistakes. We can easily forget the nice things that happened, but the bad things we should always talk about. (Zim; traditional healer)

Discrepancies becomes apparent, here. First, tradition starts off on a humble note: we go to the place of the spirits to ask for help. By comparison, acts of remembrance at heroes' acres are full of self-praise and pride. The prominent feeling around national celebrations is supposed to be that "we have done it!" Memories of success come in handy for this purpose, whereas the healer insists that unpleasant things should be remembered most of all: that is where change is needed, to improve people's lot. For politicians, by comparison, it is convenient to forget what is difficult or even painful to explain, as continued poverty, inequality, tribalism, oppression of and by ex-freedom fighters and the like.

A second difference between modern and traditional acts of remembering is related to the first. Those whom we remember as individual heroes, obviously, are people whom we used to know:

> I think the objective is for them to remind themselves that … at that time some people died, notably so-and-so. They would just read the names and remember that these are the people who died for us to get our freedom. (Zim; chief)

From a traditional viewpoint, there is not too much of a difference between those who are so remembered and us, thus their power to help us would also be limited. At the gravesite at the homestead, we ask the spirits of the known deceased to approach more powerful spirits on our behalf, to mediate for us. This is exactly why not so much can be expected from going to a heroes' acre, because there you can "just talk to the spirits of those who are buried there" (see p. 33) – there is no truly strong spiritual power behind them to whom they could pass on whatever questions and pleas we, the living, have. This is a long cry from going to a traditional shrine, where the spirits of times immemorial can be approached.

So when a traditional healer is asked to consider which memorialisation pro-cesses can have a healing or reconciling effect, and to decide which approach will help to improve the future lot of people, she leaves no room for doubt:

> I think that our way helps us. I am a healer, but if my ancestors had not prescribed that I help an individual, I could not … help even if I used the right medicines … I think that the Njelele way helps us. I believe so because Njelele has always had this spirit that is linked to the creation of the world. (Zim; traditional healer)

A traditional leader agrees:

> We can only talk of the traditional way, because when done properly, that's the

better one. (Zim; chief)

These statements on traditional processes display the sense of ownership that is one of the formal requirements of any genuine act of memorialisation. This is not to say that true conviction can be found only on the side of traditionalists, whilst on the side of politically minded people, we only deal with pretence, lies or denial. Asked if the omission of cleansing ceremonies at the end of the guerrilla war had had any effect on developments after indep-endence, a Zimbabwean ex-freedom fighter and human rights activist replied:

No, to me it's just a political thing.

Still, for most of our interviewees – certainly for the 'ordinary people' among them –, it is within the framework prescribed by tradition that acts and symbols of memorialisation carry meaning, and may have healing properties.

Conceptual discussion

He who remembers the past, one eye must be torn out. He who forgets, both. (Rosencof & Huidobro, Memorias del calabozo, Montevideo 1987/88)

[We m]ust *remember* the ills that we have experienced[, a]nd then we must *forget* all of the ills in order to help with … reconciliation and laying the foundation for a new Malawi. We must not carry the ills with us – they will make the future bitter. (Mal; employee at National Museum; our italics)

The struggle against power is the struggle against forgetting. (Milan Kundera)

If there is one common denominator for a sound majority of interview statements on memorialisation, from all five participating countries, it is the unquestioned conviction that there is one 'true' account of history, thus one correct way of memorialising. Be the interviewees politicians in power; be they politicians in opposition, sitting safely in parliament or on the run from government hit squads; be they intellectuals with an interest in the *res publica*; be they 'ordinary' people who fought and suffered, with the interest to finally be given what they feel is their due: they all maintain that there is a truthful historical reason to justify the place they occupy in society (if they belong to the haves), or the claim they make to such a place (if they belong to the have-nots).

Governments use (in opposition terminology: abuse) history to legitimise the rightfulness of their hold on to power; the opposition puts forward its own reading of history to justify the need for change.

The controversy in Mozambique about Andre Matsangaissa's hero status, for example, is about RENAMO's role in the past: was it a movement fighting for democracy against a dictatorial FRELIMO regime, or was it a tool in the hands of imperialist powers bent on reversing the achievements of the fight for independence? Tied to this is the question whether RENAMO should ever become the legitimately elected government of Mozambique.

The partisan interest to have the 'right' history told usually appears under the guise of a

demand for non-partisan *objectivity*. This becomes obvious in the discussion about how to define heroes: the rightfulness of officially declared heroes is contested by many, and future correction is sought in replacing partisan by proper procedures, biased by *objective* criteria, and interested by *neutral* decision-making bodies. Whichever party in the public forum addresses issues of general concern like independence, the nation, etc., accuses "the others", i.e., their political opponents, of sinister partisan interests whilst claiming to have none themselves, rather than openly declaring their interests and standing by them as being just and fair.

People at grassroots level, by contrast, seldom claim to pursue interests beyond their own, and are therefore much less bothered about objectivity. What they want and demand, in their majority, is very concrete: recognition of their suffering through reparations, as replacement of personal material losses, as local infra-structural improvements, or as acknowledgement of guilt by the perpetrators where reparation by replacement is not possible, as in the case of murdered relatives – ideally all this in combination. If public memorial- isation – national days of remembrance, shrines, monuments, etc. – does not take place against such a background, it is declared a sham, inadequate, and not suited to lead towards reconciliation. In other words, it is the *context* of memorialisation that determines whether it is a genuine undertaking.

As long as an integrated package of public memorialisation *cum* reparations has not materialised, the powerless have no other means but their shared personal memories to keep their claims alive, to maintain their self-respect and the respect for those who fought with them and died. Because they feel that their suffering has not paid to date, they must all the more hang on to their memories: so long as they remember the promises that made them risk their lives, and the price they have paid for 'transition' to come about, so long the books have not been closed and the final word has not been spoken on who is entitled to what, and who deserves what. This non-official kind of memorialisation thus serves a dual purpose: to keep alive

- the expectations of change that have for decades inspired the struggle for transition, and
- the demands for public memorialisation of, and compensation for the losses suffered during this struggle, through
    - material reparation as regional development, as individual payments to survivors, or both
    - days and acts of remembrance, shrines and monuments
    - truth telling and the admission of guilt by perpetrators
    - tracing of the disappeared
    - exhumations and reburials.

For those in power, on the other hand, memorialisation is an exercise in self-justification and self-praise, evidenced most strikingly by the way in which the heroes concept is (ab)used. Apart from recounting the evils of the previous regime over and over again – yet another endeavour in self-justification –, forgetting is their preferred strategy when it comes to issues that were and still are problematic. They are keen to forget

- the sacrifices by the many who supported the struggle, and who have as yet not been compensated; and

- the crimes committed by the liberation movements on their way to power, and by liberation-movements-turned-governments in power.

They also prefer to forget measuring the present against the yardstick of the expectations that inspired the struggle for transition. As a result, present-day fear and silence, racism and tribalism, and disrespect of human life and dignity go publicly unnoticed, so far as the powerful can ensure. Every effort is made to deny the continuity between past and present.

The educated and employed occupy a precarious middle ground between the powerful and the powerless. Although some have suffered immensely, they display a remarkable willingness to accommodate past human rights abuses in the name of the unity of the nation. Most notably in Malawi with its long period of post-colonial dictatorship, even the most horrible crimes meet but qualified condemnation because the perpetrator was "one of us". Did we find this readiness for compromise, for letting the past appear in less sombre colours, because this group enjoys privileges like prestigious posts and good salaries, sees these as gracefully granted by an all powerful government, and is prepared not to bite the hand that feeds it?

To a lesser extent, the readiness to compromise for the sake of nationhood also applies to the condemnation of SWAPO crimes by Namibian, and of FRELIMO and RENAMO crimes by Mozambican interviewees. Zimbabwe, where presently pressure is on the government to yield usurped power, is different in this respect. ZANU/PF's inability to 'feed' can no longer be ignored and has led to the defection of many of 'the educated' to the opposition. When the powerful of today might well be chased out of office tomorrow, deference is increasingly replaced by justified demands. South Africa, on the other hand, with its much more developed economy, has an infinitely stronger civil sector than any of its regional neighbours. The government, even if strong, does not have a stranglehold on society as a whole: there are companies, universities, NGOs, churches, etc. that will employ individuals even without the state's approval. Possibly as a result, we have not heard from South Africa the kind of submissive, self-denying praise of the government by its educated and employed erstwhile victims that is sometimes difficult to understand, particularly in Malawian interviewees.

The topic of present-day interests that shape the particular version of history compatible with them, is explicitly mentioned only in a few interviews with academics: "[W]hat needs to be done is to change our politics – as we are, we are to be more balanced. Balance the political terrain and the political environment, then you allow a balanced view of memorialisation" (Zim; political scientist and brother of late veteran liberation politician who was denied hero status by ZANU/PF). However, the issue is present as an undercurrent in interviews from all five countries. The more transcripts we studied, the more we came to appreciate the principle that "the battle over history is never really about the past – it's about the future".[11] This holds true for those in power who must justify their salaries and lifestyle. It also gives meaning to the statements of the many who took part in the political struggle without, in their own assessment, benefiting in any major concrete way – those who suffered before and still suffer today. For many of them, we should never forget, future is not a distant thing; it is the next meal, the roof to protect them from the next thunderstorm, the rains needed for the next crop. We hope it has become clear that their versions of history are also created to serve present purposes and point to a future as they

perceive it should be.

This does not amount to saying that people simply do not tell the truth – they tell *their* truth. Contrary to what might seem an obvious objection, this does not rule out the possibility of deliberate lies. Which role Bakili Muluzi concretely played in Banda's days, when as administrative secretary of the Malawi Congress Party he was in charge of the notorious Young Pioneers, whether he gave orders that led to assassinations or not, is a task for a historian similar to a detective's in a murder investigation. If an interview were possible, Muluzi could answer truthfully to such questions, or he could try to hide part of what he knows he did: he could lie. However, for queries on such specific issues to arise, there must already be doubts and suspicions, reasons why the storyline as such, of the United Democratic Front and its leader as selfless fighters for Malawian democracy, might or could or should be called into question.[12]

Whether the struggle for transition was about liberating the black majority, or about replacing a class of white exploiters by a black one, or about a mixture of these two possibilities, is not a question regarding one *detail* in a particular story line. It is an invitation to scrutinise stories in their entirety. Which is most consistent internally and has most power to convince? In the light of which does a host of factual details best make sense? The criterion of truth lies at times (when a storyline has been accepted already) in the comparison of a particular statement with individual crude facts. At other times, it lies in the consistency and persuasiveness of the storyline itself.

Memory serves a purpose: it helps us deal with the present, by making use of information from the past. For this to be possible, there is a need to remember *and* a need to forget: "[I]t's impossible to hold on to the past as the past. … Imagine what would happen if our memories lasted as long as the events themselves. We wouldn't have any time left over to live our lives, and that can't be right. The past has to 'wear out' before we can go on. And that applies not only to our personal lives, but to countries as well."[13] Memory puts everything into perspective and leads towards a 'balanced' outlook on life. But memory can also make us lose perspective: the victim of TOV who has lost trust in humanity after experiencing man at his worst, cannot trust anybody, anymore – and suffers from this. This is the form the TOV experience, which as a concrete event in time is a matter of the past, takes on in the present. It is one reason why torture survivors have said that the worst is not the torture, but life after torture.[14] To be *able* to remember, means to be able to select what is still relevant. By contrast, a flash-back or nightmare mean lack of choice; they are memories imposed against the victim's will.

We take this to be one of the explanations why so many of our interviewees feel strongly about the disappeared, and about those not buried properly: the memories – in the interviewees' words, the spirits of those whose deaths were never properly acknowledged – keep coming back and impose themselves. There is unresolved mourning and lack of closure so long as the relatives do not know as much as can be known, particularly if the perpetrators are still around. Once the necessary information is available in those known to be improperly buried, the need is often expressed for exhumations and reburials so as to achieve closure. To speak, in this context, of the "opening of old wounds", denies that these wounds were never given a chance to close, in the first place.

Tracing the disappeared and exhuming to rebury are activities that are deliberately neglected or even actively obstructed by those who are officially tasked with memorialisation. Too much could come to light that would not reflect positively on the liberation forces and their leaders, or on post-'transition' governments. But unresolved mourning, the need to know the truth and the need for closure are there, and so long as "people have disappeared and … are not accounted for – forget about peace and healing." (see p. 20)

The antagonism between CSOs and the state stems from a role CSOs have, apparently not only in the eyes of interviewees, but also of governments: to be a watchdog, a critical observer, possibly even a substitute of a political opposition if the latter is too weak to put up a challenge. For memorialisation, this means that CSOs should record, systematise, and disseminate versions of history that are ignored or suppressed in the official discourse on the past. As governments show no enthusiasm at all with regard to tracing the disappeared, and facilitating exhumations and reburials, a number of interviewees feel that CSOs must get involved and support families who want to satisfy the expectations of their dead as well as find out the truth for themselves, and thus hope to achieve closure.

The spectrum of victims' sentiments encompasses the determination never to forget, and the wish to forget and get on with life; the readiness to reconcile and the desire for revenge. Not to forget may have the goal of keeping one's (political) identity. Because torture qua brainwashing attempts to rob the victim of his identity and make him compliant with the torturers' goals and whims, not to lose one's identity means to deny success to them. But life also goes on, for example after the death of loved ones, and not to be able to forget may mean that the torturer has succeeded in destroying his victim's life, even beyond the point of physically having the opportunity to torture them.[15]

The urge of society at large to get on with life, appears to victims as an attempt to ignore their plight. They didn't achieve what they fought for, thus suffered in vain, and their rightful claims to a share of the cake, to compensation for their losses, to admission of guilt and an apology by perpetrators, are brought into disrepute by simply forgetting about their role in bringing about political change. Still, their readiness to settle for very little materially, to settle even for token recognition and reconcile, is huge: revenge is not much spoken about.

Tradition in the context of memorialisation stands out for several reasons:

- there is a firm sense of ownership by 'ordinary' people, so conspicuously absent from most government-promoted activities; specific rituals are regarded as a given that just has to be adhered to, whilst modern memorialisation activities appear as the result of an arbitrary decision-making process;
- the proper traditional ways are highly specific, to suit particular families;
- the followers of tradition stand humbly before powers stronger than themselves, rather than priding themselves for their achievements, and
- the memories of what went wrong, instead of being denied, figure prominently because from them, future improvement can spring.

The *nation* concept, whilst playing an important role in modern thinking, has no established

place in tradition; with *family*, it seems to be almost the other way round. We therefore see that

- for many of the educated, the idea of the nation is so important as to even justify the denial of their own and their relatives' suffering;
- for people rooted in tradition, the relevance of the extended family can not be overstated; this includes the spirits of the dead, communication with whom is a strictly intra-familial matter (which may in part explain why modern ways of memorialisation like national heroes' acres have so little appeal).

Modern thinking has no positive role at all for the spirits, except as a non-entity that has to be factored in because, undeniably, so many African peoples take their existence for granted. A convenient compromise sees them as a psychological phenomenon to be used in placebo fashion. A majority of our interviewees, however, regard ancestral spirits as a major influence on their lives whose existence only a madman would deny. Because people had no say, up to now, when decisions on memorialisation activities were taken, one may with only slight exaggeration sum up the present state of affairs as follows:

- what is more than anything else regarded as relevant and meaningful by people, is absent from the officially promoted spectrum of memorialisation activities; conversely,
- the memorialisation activities which are officially promoted and practised, are neither relevant nor meaningful in the eyes of the majority of people.

There has never been a controversy about the present being a function of the past: how we perceive the world and what we do today is shaped by our past experience. Equally important, however, is the notion that the past is a function of the present: we tend to remember of the past what suits and serves us today, in a way in which it serves us. On the other hand, we are not at liberty to choose what should influence our present, we cannot wilfully decide what our past should have been like. This becomes apparent when we look at the opposite of remembering: forgetting. Memories are lost which we should want to keep, and want to be kept by others. At the same time, and not only as nightmares and flash backs, memories persist which we should like not to bother us any more. This happens with quite ordinary daytime memories: the poor cannot forget the money they lost yesterday, because today they have none.

Our interviews with victims point toward a high degree of inter-relatedness of these processes. In one direction, this is received wisdom: the traumas inflicted upon us in our past shape our present. But many of our interviewees pointedly mention a process that takes place in the opposite direction: they insist that present-day realities of life have an effect on how traumatogenic any event of the past turns out to be in the long run. This obviously is not to say that an event can never as such qualify as *abuse* or *torture* in a moral or legal sense, but it does mean that what we have become used to calling "trauma" is not a definitive and once-and-for-all immutable thing: it is the entirety of a victim's physical and psychological and spiritual *response* to an attack on her/his integrity – the wound and its interpretation – and this response remains dependent on current context.

A Rwandan proverb says "The truth hurts, but silence kills as well". One way to understand this could be with reference to the indisputable fact that more often than not, our present

does not structurally differ from our past in many respects. The proverb would then express that it is so painful to speak openly about the past because it is *not* exactly past and gone (e.g., the perpetrators are still among us and are still in power). But to keep silent is not a healthy alternative, either, because it means to deny not only what once *was*, but what still *is* a reality: when the past is denied, history is re-written not just for the past's sake, but for the purpose of whitewashing the present. The truth about the past is thus so painful for the victims – whether acknowledged in words or denied in silence – because they cannot think of it with the confidence and certainty that all is over, bad as it might have been. The bad past is still with them, otherwise they would gradually have forgotten about it, knowing that they need not worry any more; and if for some reason they did remember (maybe because of being reminded by something or somebody), they would after a sufficient length of time not be struck any more, at an existential level of their being.

The bad past makes its presence felt in a very practical way. In all our societies, the main reason once given why there was a need to fight, was the oppression of the majority of the population. But this history of oppression continues. Maybe not in South Africa where, as we have regretted before, grassroots victims were not interviewed, but in the four other countries, interviewees openly express this, like this one from Namibia:

> SWAPO doesn't want people to talk about these things. The government creates political fear. They use the policy of National Reconciliation as a strategy to silence people. … "You don't ask me, I don't ask you." … That's the agenda of the ruling party, it preaches reconciliation and in the process suppresses others' ideas. People are sort of forced to compromise and the state doesn't create room for debating of issues. (chief cultural officer in the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture)

Many internal contradictions can be found in the interview transcripts – not surprisingly so, as interviewees had no prior knowledge of the questions they would be asked and replied spontaneously. Many interviewees are critical of their governments and speak in favour of political diversity, thus rejecting their ruling parties' attempts to *de facto* create one-party states. But, clearly self-contradictorily, when they discuss national unity, most of these critics seem to have the metaphorical happy, conflict-free family headed by a strong father on their minds, whilst unity in diversity is rarely the ideal. This needs to be kept in mind when interpreting the quotations we presented above: contradictory positions do not open up between countries. Even between individuals on opposite sides of political divides, contradictory positions cannot dispel the reader's impression of agreement in ever so many respects. Pointedly one may say that the level of contradiction *between* different interviewees is not higher than *within* individual interviews themselves.

Contradictory positions in and between interviews mean that it is not possible to draw a few conclusions which most interviewees could be expected to happily go along with. In honouring our own suggestion that actors on the political scene should declare their interests and stand by them because they consider them to be just and fair, we shall not claim that the conclusions we are about to draw are the 'objective' result of our disinterested study of the interview transcripts. Rather, we shall try to sum up what *victims* might be able to agree upon, now that they have done their share to get transitional processes on their way and still wait to benefit beyond the formal political level. Our allegiance is to them, not to the true or would-be former freedom fighters who today occupy the first-class

compartments of the gravy train. As we understand them, victims in their majority demand that

- their memories of sacrifice and suffering for the cause of the struggle must inform decision making about material reparations;
- material reparations should never be intended to *replace* memorialisation activities: ceremonies, naming of buildings, schools, or streets, monuments at specific sites, days of remembrance, reburials, etc;
- for reparations and memorialisation to lead, together, to reconciliation, that is, for victims to be able to forgive and to begin to forget, perpetrators must come forward with the truth (confess), show contrition and a firm purpose of amendment, and offer penance;
- about the disappeared, as much information as still is possible to collect must be given to their relatives;
- cases of the improperly buried must be handled in accordance with their families' wishes, which includes exhumations and reburials; and
- the expectations of change that have for decades inspired the struggle for transition, must remain the guiding principle of political decision making today.

It seems tempting to include in this list a demand that addresses tradition. However, although traditionally minded interviewees say a lot about the relevance of tradition, it is not easily cast in a mould that makes it fit into the world of politics. Not unlike Christian religion, traditional beliefs are constantly at risk of being drawn into the political arena by those who want to (ab)use them as a means to their ends. Christian sycophants may be found like the Anglican bishop of Harare who is prepared to declare that power was vested in self-declared "President" Robert Mugabe by God;[16] through traditional leaders of a similar mould, traditional belief is at risk of also losing its credibility and cutting edge. It may be best to insist that traditional beliefs (like Christianity) are incommensurate with any specific kind of politics, and by doing so let them keep their potential as a critical counterweight to politics of whatever persuasion. The mere right of traditional healers or leaders to speak out, and help organise the rituals those personally involved deem fit, without any further definition of what it is they should say or do, is therefore the only addition we would make to the above list of demands.

Notes:

[1] In the words of general Janssens, the Belgian army commander in the Congo at the time it gained independence in 1960, "Before Independence = After Independence" (quoted in Ascherson, N., *The Crocodiles Gathered*, London Review of Books 23, no. 19, 4 October 2001, p. 17)

[2] In the group of politicians, Zimbabwe is represented with opposition views only, because all attempts to interview leading ZANU/PF representatives failed. In Namibia, Malawi and Mozambique, both government and opposition voices could be heard. In South Africa, party politicians proper were not interviewed, although party-political perspectives were put forward by the political scientists who volunteered to speak.

[3] A modification needs to be made for one of the countries under study, South Africa:

interviewees from there were moderate in their criticism of its government and political class. This might result from their politicians genuinely being different from those in the other four countries (if only because under closer scrutiny from a stronger civil society), or from the shorter time lapse since political change has come about. Interviews by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation with the Khulumani survivors' organisation (Johannesburg, 20.5.03) indicate that the grace period granted to the ANC government may be about to come to an end: "I think the leaders forget that they are where they are today because of us."

[4] At the end of quotations, the country of origin is always given in brackets (Nam [Namibia], Mal [Malawi], Moz [Mozambique], SA [South Africa], and Zim [Zimbabwe]). If relevant and not mentioned in the text already, we also provide information on the speaker, like role in the struggle, position presently held, etc.

[5] The army was deployed to Matabeleland in the '80s to quell all resistance against ZANU rule; maybe 20000 were killed. "It was a frightening time and you were not allowed to be seen talking and you had to pretend not to be knowing anything and act 'normal'." (Zim; victim)

[6] In view of the technical problems mentioned above, this assessment appears a bit optimistic and applies perhaps primarily to cases of building tombs/memorials, without prior exhumation.

[7] We should not overlook the side of urban intellectual arrogance contained in this statement. By opposing "bush" and "normal places of meeting", it flatly denies that what is a "normal" meeting place for the majority of people in our countries, would be regarded as "bush" by any self-respecting urbanite.

[8] Orwell, G., *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Harmondsworth 1986, p. 197.

[9] Njelele is a highly important traditional shrine.

[10] Most of what is said on the following pages draws on information given by Malawian and Zimbabwean interviewees with a traditional role (chiefs, headmen, or the like). About the view of traditional healers, in particular, we can only report from Zimbabwe.

[11] Milne, S., *The battle for history*, The Guardian Weekly, Sept 19-25, 2002, p. 11.

[12] See Phiri, K.M., *A case of revolutionary change in contemporary Malawi: the Malawi army and the disarming of the Malawi Young Pioneers*, Journal of peace, conflict and military studies 1, no. 1, March 2000, for information on the history of the MYP.

[13] Nooteboom, C., All Souls Day, London 2001, p. 167.

[14] Cf. Ortiz, D., with Davis, P., *The Blindfold's Eyes; My Journey from Torture to Truth*, New York 2002.

[15] "Often, it may not do any good to remember. But we may feel that it is right, or fitting, or proper." (Sontag, S., *Reflections on The Deputy*, in: Sontag, S., *Against Interpretation*, London 1994, p. 125).

[16] The official outcome of the presidential elections in 2002, like that of the parliamentary elections before and after, has been declared fraudulent by most independent observers.