

What do we tell our children?

The work of the Centre for Ubuntu in Cape Town (formerly the Religious Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission)

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Introduction

The Centre for Ubuntu (formerly the Religious Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) is one of the initiatives that shaped and accompanied the process of truth and reconciliation in the Western Cape. It was formed initially as a 'civil campaign' and was meant to be a response of local faith communities to the South African process of transition. The formation of the campaign took place in 1994, parallel to the creation process of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). After shaping the way in which the TRC was conceptualised, the campaign operated as a parallel platform to the Commission's process and beyond. Looking at the work of the Religious Response to the TRC (RR)/Centre for Ubuntu (CFU) provides an insight into one particular facet of public participation in the South African attempt at dealing with the apartheid past. The basic idea of the campaign was to be an 'interfaith and religious response' combining a spiritual approach with a public and political platform that would address questions of truth, healing and reconciliation in a local context.

The research, on which this report is based, focused on the creation process, the intervention activities and subsequent changes that the initiative has undergone since its formation in 1994. The report is meant to provide an insight into the history and operation of the initiative (the original campaign and the organisation that grew out of it), highlighting the main aspects and activities and sketching some of the debates and dynamics it generated. What themes and issues have been of interest in the Western Cape before, during and after the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? What were the aims and activities of the faith communities and organisations that the initiative sought to represent? What were its main achievements and challenges?

Methodology & Objectives

The research for this study was conducted as an intensive qualitative assessment of the Centre for Ubuntu's activities as part of the larger discourse on truth and reconciliation in the Western Cape.

The research methodology consisted of:

- participant observation at a variety of the Centre's activities such as workshops, forums, talks and presentations over a period of two years (1997-2000); in these processes I served as observer, participant, and facilitator and kept a field journal;
- an assessment and analysis of the existing documentation on the campaign (the Religious Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and the organisation that grew out of it (Centre for Ubuntu); minutes of meetings, annual reports, funding proposals, newsletters, etc.
- in-depth interviews with staff and volunteers of the initiative as well as a focus group with the 'Counselling Working Group', one of the original planning bodies for the campaign's intervention work;
- the production of a video documentary on one of the CFU's activities, a commemorative storytelling event with former residents of District Six in Cape Town (Kayser 1999).

The fieldwork did not provide sufficient material for an empirical impact assessment of the RR/CFU's activities analysing their effects on participants. However, in addition to the volunteer and staff interviews, selected interviews were conducted with participants and facilitators of the various interventions.

A Short History

1994-1998: The Religious Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (RR)

On 27 October 1994 a group of interested members of civil society in the Western Cape held a public meeting under the auspices of the Western Cape Province Council of Churches (WCPCC), the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and other peacebuilding and conflict resolution-related organisations. The meeting was advertised to discuss the implications of the proposed South African truth commission in the local context of the Western Cape. It was attended by about 300 people¹ who decided to form a civil campaign² that would provide a public forum for debate about the planned truth commission, about ways of dealing with apartheid's legacies in the Cape, the possibility of reconciliation, the responsibilities of the churches, and other issues.

Out of this gathering followed the formation of the Religious Response to the Truth Commission (RR). The Religious Response was founded initially as a support campaign to the TRC that would offer an 'interfaith response' to the process of truth and reconciliation.

The initiative organised itself into interest groups in order to explore the possibilities for active engagement in the TRC-process. Its size diminished to about forty people consisting of individual members from various churches, generally with anti-apartheid activist backgrounds and building on existing networks of civil resistance against apartheid during the 80s, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as [Lawyers for Human Rights](#), the Black Sash, the National Association of Democratic Lawyers (N.A.D.E.L.), the

Mayibuye Centre, the [Trauma Centre for Victims of Violence and Torture](#), and others. The interest in the truth and reconciliation process formed a link between these different organisations, however in the longer term it was largely interested individuals within this informal network who defined a common mission and continued the networking approach with faith communities. They formed the so-called 'working groups' within the Religious Response:

- lobbying & networking (ensuring input of the faith communities into the formation process of the TRC; facilitating public access to the TRC);
- education & resources (educating the public about the aims of the TRC and gaining support for the process);
- monitoring & writing up (monitoring and recording the impact of the TRC; ensuring an interfaith process);
- counselling & training (called the 'Counselling Working Group') (creating a network of counsellors and support groups for survivors of human rights violations; creating a parallel process to the TRC to "heal and reconcile the nation" - the Healing of Memories process)

and

- finance (seeking to acquire the funding necessary to conduct a successful campaign around the TRC).

The objectives of the campaign centred on the idea that faith communities should take an active stand in post-apartheid political processes and not view their responsibilities as disconnected from the larger political context of change in the country:

I would say that religious communities, no matter what their faith is, are still stuck in thinking that to be spiritual is not in the first instance to be concerned with social issues and material poverty, and so forth. So counselling and therapy still lies right in the centre of religious communities' focus. That is what they do the best. Therefore we are many times perceived to be just that (Convenor RR, 1996)

In this sense the initiative was aimed at offering psychological and spiritual assistance to victims of human rights violations and at the same time facilitate a platform for political engagement such as debates, lobbying and advocacy.

We invite the faith communities there, to come forward with proposals from their side on what reconciliation and restitution will mean effectively, materially, in their context. (Convenor RR, 1996).

Despite sustained efforts at ensuring a platform for political debate, in the long-term, it was the 'healing' intervention, created by the initiative's 'Counselling Working Group', that proved to be the most successful and ongoing activity of the RR. The idea of the group was

to create a broader storytelling process at local level in addition to the TRC, through which individuals and communities could speak about their experiences during the apartheid years.

So we said, let's make sure the cycle stops, so that today's victims will not become the victimisers of tomorrow. So that was a very important part of saying 'everybody has a story to tell'. [To extend the telling of stories about the apartheid years to *all* South Africans] was an important thought for our people. We wanted to make it something for all, wanted to engage religious societies in this sort of thing. (Member of the RR, 9/99)

The Healing of Memories workshops that were developed by this group continue until today. The Counselling Working Group is also the only initial working group of the RR that is still in existence.³ Target audiences of the campaign initially were mainly faith communities and NGOs, but the aim was to reach out to 'all' communities in South Africa:

The ideal place for healing to come into effect is the faith communities who were involved in the struggle before the new Government came into being. And the faith communities who were not involved in the struggle will also need to be pulled in and liberated from their past. And all of that involves memories of the past. ... It is not just for religious people. ... Anyone is welcome. (Convenor RR, 1996)

There were diverging opinions among the members of the campaign as to whether its focus should lie more with providing services to victims and survivors of the apartheid years or with the broader concept of reconciliation, as in bringing South Africans of different backgrounds into contact and dialogue with each other. There were also many discussions about the significance of religion and faith in the process and whether they can be vehicles to achieve reconciliation or rather result in exclusion and alienation of a number of other communities and groups, that do not define themselves through religion or faith.

During the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's operation the main activity of the RR - besides the Healing of Memories workshops – consisted of a public forum meeting, held monthly to discuss current issues and developments around the TRC-process. Topics at these meetings included presentations and reflections on:

- the work of the TRC;
- amnesty;
- reparations;
- truth and forgiveness;
- dealing with human rights violations;
- the role of the faith communities during and after apartheid;
- forced removals;
- and others.

Speakers were often Truth Commissioners, leaders of faith communities and people closely connected to the process coming from various non-governmental organisations. Forums were held in different venues around Cape Town such as Mowbray, Gugulethu, Mitchell's

Plain, Observatory, and Bonteheuwel. Initially these forums were also used to provide information on the process of the TRC itself, informing people about the procedure of testifying, about plans for reparations, etc.

In 1998 the Religious Response to the TRC experienced a shift with the formal ending of the main Truth and Reconciliation body. Till that point, the activities of the campaign included:

- creating the Healing of Memories process;
- supporting and monitoring the TRC in its work;
- conducting the monthly forum discussions;
- networking with different faith communities and holding interfaith meetings and celebrations.

The other working groups (monitoring and networking; education and resources; and lobbying and networking) did not produce such visible results as the 'counselling working group,' but participated in debates and workshops about TRC-related issues in the Western Cape throughout the life-span of the Commission. Individual members of the RR were also active in supporting survivors during and after their giving of testimony to the TRC.

Up to that point, the campaign had viewed itself mainly as a support base and response to the TRC. After the ending of the Commission's main activities in October 1998, it was confronted with the question whether and how it might continue. There had also been problems around the name of the campaign as many apartheid survivors who had testified before the Commission confused the 'Religious Response to the TRC' with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission itself. Conflicts between 'victims' and the Commission, especially around reparations, were projected onto the campaign. The initiative had to emphasise that it did not operate within the institutional framework of the TRC. Being more catharsis than problem-oriented at the time, the initiative put more emphasis on offering further spaces for healing rather than service or advocacy work. It aimed to meet the *spiritual* and *psychological* needs of survivors outside and beyond the TRC, but could not provide immediate structural or economic help as some survivors had hoped.

1998-2000: The Centre for Ubuntu

The decision to transform the Religious Response to the TRC (a volunteer campaign) into the 'Centre for Ubuntu' (CFU) (a non-governmental organisation) was made in August 1998. Centre for Ubuntu was also deemed a better name to demonstrate the initiative's commitment to people of *any* faith and spiritual belief rather than those adhering to a particular religion. The mission of the Centre for Ubuntu shifted from supporting the Commission's process to addressing *post-TRC* issues as well as the concerns of survivors and the broader constituency of the Western Cape. The Centre continued to conduct monthly forums now aiming at providing a public platform for future-oriented issues such as:

- reparations;
- the implementation of TRC recommendations;
- questions of reconciliation;
- interfaith initiatives;

- readings of the TRC report;
- crime and violence;
- commemoration practices;
- restorative justice;
- and others.

In addition to the regular members, many of the forums were also attended by former participants of Healing of Memories workshops⁴ and thus served as a platform for follow-up and networking for the workshops. The work of the Centre for Ubuntu also extended its focus to interfaith activities with the District Six community leading to two Saturday-workshops on memories and personal stories with former residents at the District Six museum. Another aspect that was developed in 1999 was the work with children and youth aimed at creating workshops that could engage young South Africans in a dialogue with the past, with their parents and with each other.

Since 1997 the campaign had employed a full-time co-ordinator. From March 2000, the Centre for Ubuntu had to return to being a volunteer initiative due to lack of funding. During its full-time operation the Centre was hosted in the offices of the Western Cape Province Council of Churches (WCPC). At the end of 2000 the Centre for Ubuntu was formally closed down and suspended due to lack of resources.

Key Themes

During its time of its operation the RR/CFU participated in and took part in shaping some of the discourses around the idea of 'dealing with the (apartheid) past' in the Western Cape. Sketched below are some of the key terms, concepts and themes that were in use in the initiative's day-to-day work. This section outlines some of the definitions, as used by members of the campaign, and traces the discussions about their meaning and implementation.

Truth

In the initial debates of the RR campaign, especially during the formation process of the TRC, the question of 'truth' featured significantly more than at a later stage. Truth was seen as an essential ingredient of the much-mentioned idea of 'never again', a means to prevent the repetition of violent, unjust and oppressive system such as apartheid. Truth was also seen to be an important part of a healing process, which featured in the often-quoted metaphor of 'opening wounds so that they can be cleansed and then they will heal' (field notes 1996). At the same time the concept of Truth as enacted through the TRC was seen in relation to the larger compromise of the negotiated settlement in South Africa:

The context of the negotiated solution pre-empted that whole kind of basic premise that truth would be more important than justice in certain senses. ... The option to go for truth really was one of inviting people to go on board, to come up with their side of the story, to provide the space for both perpetrators as well as victims of gross human rights violations - to put their story on the table and to some extent recapture the truth of our past in that way ... showing what we have done to each other and then on that build a new morale and say

'let's not repeat it in the future'. (Convenor RR, 9/96)

Truth was seen as one essential feature for making reconciliation possible. The need for South Africans to tell each other the truth about the apartheid years was seen as universal, leading the campaign to try and appeal to survivors, perpetrators and all other South Africans alike to speak about their experiences of apartheid. This led to the campaign's aim to include a broader spectrum of South Africans into a process of 'truth-telling' than were able to testify at the TRC itself. It led to the call for the creation of more and broader 'quasi-TRC'-processes (field notes 1997, conversation with Member of RR, 1999).

We have got to go up there because then we can begin to be one people when we acknowledge to ourselves what it was that we did. [If] we put it on the table rather than bury it, and then it becomes part of the foundation of reconciliation. (Member of RR, 9/96)

Reconciliation

Our idea about reconciliation is that real reconciliation is impossible if the truth is not told. But both of them are processes and very problematic because you will have someone telling the truth, unfortunately just from one side ... the oppressors are still silent which is a problem of the TRC and a problem for our campaign. (RR member, 9/96)

Members of the RR were aware at an early stage in the process of some of the problematic aspects in the way in which the South African process defined the relation between truth and reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a baby-step to forgiveness ... Reconciliation is something that is almost mentioned too soon after the truth is told. ... And then to speak of 'healing the nation' is almost a very presumptuous statement because we all speak about it, yes, but we just try and take small steps and just enlighten people's minds with the facts of the past, and facilitate a process that they can not just have it as baggage but integrate it and move towards reconciliation. (RR member, 9/99)

While the TRC human rights violations hearings were in process, the campaign continued to monitor the progress of reconciliation by 'truth telling':

In one way we are getting more and more of the truth, but in another sense reconciliation is not really happening because there is no acknowledgement by those who did it. So we have a truth commission, we do not have a reconciliation commission. (RR member, 9/99)

In practice, the TRC process soon showed all the historical and structural complexities of a national project built on the ideal of reconciliation in South Africa. Certain disillusionment also accompanied the process of the RR campaign (field notes 1998). While reconciliation as a concept and the ways in which it could or could not be achieved were subject of long discussions among RR members, it remained one of the overall objectives of the initiative as outlined in its Mission Statement:

We are people of faith engaged in a journey towards healing the past and reconciling fellow South Africans. (Constitution RR/CFU)

In the discussions and debates on reconciliation several important issues emerged.

The **need for economic restitution and improvement of livelihoods** was emphasised as the key to a process of reconciliation by many survivors.

What does it mean to someone who lives in a shanty house that hasn't got water and electricity, what are they being reconciled to? That's too general, we are not interested in theorisation, that's not our agenda, our agenda is getting a better life. So I think a lot depends on where you are sitting. (RR Member, 9/96)

The **complexities of local political processes**, for instance in the Western Cape, that needed to be taken into account:

The African National Congress is also having a problem with blacks and coloureds in the Western Cape. They have voted in large numbers for the Nationalist Party, so the African National Congress is giving up. Why should we be fighting for a community that is not voting for us? This, I think, has important implications for the reconciliation and healing of our nation. (RR member, 9/96)

The need for **cross-racial reconciliation** as in 'coming together across the divides created by the apartheid system' and 'experiencing each other as human beings' rather than as members of a certain apartheid racial category, at the same time dealing with the necessity to address questions of **responsibility, accountability and re-distribution**.

Reconciliation - it's about those who are divided ... beginning to experience the common humanity and the people in their fundamental unity. And where there has been war, the making of peace. And making peace involves the acceptance that these things happened and that they have accepted some responsibility for that. ... For reconciliation to really work you then begin a more appropriate use of national resources, you have wealth that is shared. ... The spiritual concept [of reconciliation is important] in that sense, but for it to happen there are physical things that need to happen [first] for it to be meaningful as an exercise. (RR Member, 9/96)

Different members of the campaign put different emphasis on the variety of interpretations of the reconciliation concept that were circulating at the time of the campaign. Some saw the need to emphasise a more symbolic, collective idea of reconciliation, a form of 'coming together' as setting signs of nation building. Others found the individual level more important at which South Africans were to strive to overcome racial division and hatred through cathartic processes of storytelling and joint practice of faith. Again others argued for a more problem-oriented approach placing emphasis on structural change and development rather than the pursuit of a vague concept such as reconciliation.

It may be the initial ambiguity and open-ended nature of the term 'reconciliation' that

allowed it to accommodate the diversity of opinions present within the campaign and allowed for some form of dialogue across some of the historical gaps created by apartheid that were also reflected in the process. Meanwhile, the way in which the concept of reconciliation was interpreted in the process of the TRC led to a number of people dropping the term in their programmes or seeking to replace it with other concepts such as 'relationship-building', 'peacebuilding', 'conflict handling' and 'development' (field notes 1999). Reconciliation as a term was increasingly viewed as part of a more conservative political discourse within the new South Africa. The continued controversies of discourse that the TRC was faced with, concerning the role and position of so-called 'white liberals' within the South African transformation process, were also subject in the RR/CFU and affected the ways in which its work was viewed and positioned within the larger local transformation process.

The different ways of understanding reconciliation as a key term, I would argue, shaped the direction into which the earlier members of the campaign took their later involvement in the process. In this context it is not surprising that the campaign initially served as a broad-based networking forum, in which many of the debates around terms and concepts could be carried out, while later - once these had taken shape - many of the partaking individuals and organisations took different directions and the membership base of the campaign increasingly began to thin out. In this way the initiative functioned as an important initial resource base and discussion platform and had a significant function in building networks, many of which continue in different shapes and formats beyond the life span of the RR/CFU.

Justice

Another important discussion within the earlier days of the campaign evolved around the question of justice and how it may or may not link with reconciliation. At the initiative's forum meetings this discussion linked questions around the amnesty process of the TRC with later debates about the concept of restorative justice.

Now amnesty by its very nature is a sacrifice of justice, so the society is saying in order to move forward we are going to sacrifice one value for the sake of another, but we can only do that for a limited time. It's a mechanism and it's a very painful mechanism because it means that those who have done terrible things don't get their just deserts at all. (RR Member, 9/96)

One of the objectives of the Centre for Ubuntu's work stated shortly after it had emerged out of the RR was to do 'Justice-Ubuntu' Research to analyse the scope of 'impact that the concept of ubuntu could have on social justice (if any) and on social relationships after the TRC process' (CFU, working document 1998). In the general documentation on the RR/CFU the focus shifts from truth and reconciliation as themes to issues related to justice, reparations and restitution, and questions of continuous healing for communities. The concept of ubuntu features increasingly.

Ubuntu

Apartheid not only targeted the people who refused to accept the supremacy of Western culture on African soil, but it also targeted the destruction of the very

cultural basis of African society – Ubuntu. Ubuntu as that opportunity which seeks to draw new appreciation from marginalised cultures and to establish new relationships as a means of co-existence. It is Ubuntu that emerges as a historical victor over apartheid's achievements ... in the hope that history may prove ... that civil society in South Africa is trying to discover new ways of making Ubuntu a cultural value and cornerstone of South African moral life. (Keith Vermeulen, RR Newsletter 1998)

The concept of Ubuntu was often mentioned in one line with reconciliation and healing during the life span of the initiative. Changing its name from the Religious Response to the TRC to Centre for Ubuntu marked an important response of the process to the larger discourse taking place around it. Ubuntu, often described as an 'African philosophy of humanism' (field notes 1999), was seen to be more inclusive and universal term that encompasses all religions and ideas of spiritual faith in what was described as a specific African interpretation.

[After the TRC] Now the time has come for civil society to play a bigger role in the reconciliation of our communities. Our task has multiplied instead of being reduced. This forced us to change the name in order to be relevant to our society and to be African. ... Our culture is based on who we are, that is African. We understand that some people have misused the word, and this is the reason we felt that we should use it for reconciliation and engage our communities on issues around it. (CFU Newsletter 9/98)

In this regard the term *ubuntu*, as it was used during the campaign, may at times have been in danger of being conflated with reconciliation or of being used to advertise the promoted 'togetherness' of the new 'rainbow nation' in a way that could not meet the realities of anger and deprivation in the campaigns' target communities. At the same time *ubuntu* represented a concept that seemed to attract a broad spectrum of South Africans and serve as a banner, under which people could come together more easily than under a religious focus.

Someone once described our society as 'living in bubbles'. What an apt metaphor. Are we so cocooned in this post-apartheid society? Is it a defence mechanism, compartmentalised living? There is the need to break the bubbles and enjoy our diversity within our African context. (Stan Abrahams, CFU Newsletter 1998)

In this sense the concept of Ubuntu was used in the work of the RR and especially the CFU as a term that encompassed a range of objectives other than reconciliation, as expressed by RR Convenor Xhola Mandlu in 1998:

European languages do not have a word that can explain the meaning of this concept. The components of Ubuntu are acts of respect, recognition, concern, compassion, forgiveness, empathy, understanding, cordiality, sincerity, generosity, hospitality, brotherhood, sisterhood, caring and sharing and many similar concepts. Ubuntu reflects a keen sense of justice, a fairness in relationship and optimising the chances of survival for all. Africans do not believe that you survive on your own or achieve anything without the support of others. That is why we say 'A person is a person through other people.' ...

Ubuntu's emphasis is on the well being of communities and this well being is the responsibility of each and every member of the community ... (Xhola Mandlu, quoted in: CFU Newsletter 5/99)

One of the facilitators of the HOM workshops gave her analysis of the ways in which *ubuntu* has been used and possibly at times abused in the context of healing and reconciliation:

I think that for me *ubuntu* is an inalienable. I cannot remove *ubuntu* from people. I think it is like a nose or a name for me, it is something that is so intrinsically human that you cannot take it out and actually even describe it and learn about it. And you know, I am always amazed about the way South Africans have gone onto this *ubuntu*-bandwagon and every time we talk, we talk about *ubuntu* this and *ubuntu* that, as if it is something to learn. As if it is something that you open your book and read about and acquire. Or you do not have it until you have read the book. You do not have it until somebody has told you about it and taught you, or you have gone to this course about *ubuntu*. It amazes me, it really amazes me because I think that people have got it inside of them, whether they happen to be black or white ...

I think it is something that we are all born with, that we are all blessed with and it is something that we just need to connect to and that is the hard part I think. ... I mean psychologists go a lot on about IT, EGO and SUPEREGO and all that. I mean we want things to be intellectual and academic so that we can value them. *Ubuntu* is not one of those, it is something that we have, already. I do not know why I have to spend 900 Rand to go and learn about it. It is there. And it speaks to me all the time. (HOM Facilitator, 7/99)

Key Activities

The Healing of Memories Workshops

We knew that there is a broader spectrum of South Africans who were really touched by the past who will not afford intense counselling because it is a very individual thing and it is a very expensive thing. More people should be able to go through a process of healing. (C.T.9/99)

The initiative of the RR provided the forum through which the Healing of Memories (HOM) workshops were developed, in collaboration with the former Chaplaincy of the Trauma Centre under Father Michael Lapsley (now Institute for Healing of Memories). Both institutions offered the workshops jointly between 1995 and 2000. The HOM workshops served as a follow-up activity for many survivors who had testified to the TRC about gross human rights violations. At the same time they aimed to draw a broader spectrum of South Africans into a long-term process of healing and reconciliation. A detailed assessment of the Healing of Memories workshops is provided in a separate report (Kayser 2000) and will not be a focus here. This is not meant to negate the vital role that the RR/CFU and its members⁵ have played in the Healing of Memories process but seeks to outline those aspects of the RR/CFU's work that took place *in addition* to the Healing of

Memories workshops. The two reports should be read together as the initiatives co-operated very closely and conducted many of their activities together.

Shaping the TRC process

Since its inception the Religious Response actively took part in the formulation and establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This happened, for example, by challenging the selection process of Commissioners that was proposed by government to include more public participation, such as nominations from civil society; open forums for questions to candidates; and a selection panel (RR Newsletter 9/95).

The campaign also submitted its own criteria according to which TRC Commissioners should be chosen, these included:

- a history and track record of involvement in Human Rights;
- a religious/faith background;
- credibility with the South African population;
- must have dealt with trauma of the past and healing must have taken place. Especially if the person is a past victim of human rights violation he/she should be motivated by reconciliation;
- be open, honest and flexible;
- be a person of moral integrity; and
- be committed to democratic values; [as well as]
- a broad representivity of South African society.⁶

The campaign also submitted a list of names to the President and the Minister of Justice to be considered as candidates for the future TRC (RR Newsletter 8/95). Several members of the RR were short-listed to be Commissioners, most notably Glenda Wildschutt, who was selected and served as a member of the TRC's Reparations Committee. The campaign also had links with Archbishop Desmond Tutu who supported the initial formation of the RR. Louis du Plooy, former co-ordinator of the RR, later also worked for the TRC and facilitated the TRC-NGO network maintaining close links with the initiative of the RR:

We [the TRC] are also setting up what we call informal support networks, [including] NGOs and individuals who can provide counselling and mental health care where we can informally refer people to after they have accessed the Commission. ... It is very important for NGOs to play that role. (RR Convenor, 9/96)

The 'cross-over' between members of the campaign and the TRC led to some of the campaign ideas being implemented through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission itself. During the operational phase of the Commission, the RR and the TRC often saw themselves working with complementary aims and concepts (see also Key Themes):

We [the TRC] will only be one of the catalysts, one of the initial steps to facilitate the process whereby people can start to deal effectively with the past and reconcile with the past and with each other. (RR Convenor, 9/96)

We [the RR initiative] are also trying to see what the Commission would not do, which is sometimes as important as trying to see what it wants [to achieve]. ... Some of our clients [at the Trauma Centre Chaplaincy], for example, were given ... therapy ... from here the process lead to them giving evidence in front of the Commission. We also addressed public meetings and churches around the Truth Commission, especially before it started giving people information. (RR Member, 9/96)

The collaboration with the TRC took shape mainly within the above-mentioned informal network through which referrals were made. The campaign supported the Commission in its attempts at outreach, networking and education. Vice versa, all survivors who testified to the TRC also received an invitation to come to a Healing of Memories workshop. At the same time the initiative understood itself as a group that would accompany the TRC critically and support as well as monitor and challenge its work, hoping to continue beyond the Commission's life span.

We existed before the Commission and we will exist after the Commission. So we have long-term goals which the Commission doesn't. We exist to respond as a help to ... those who have been victimised by political violence. We have a much wider mandate, much wider concerns ... we can see ourselves in a sort of critical attitude toward the Commission, working with it but outside and quite capable of criticising it and seeing its limitations as well ... (RR Member, 9/96)

In this way the campaign served as a critical commentator and submitted feedback-reports to the Commission, especially during the beginning of the TRC's process:

The TRC is the commission established to deal with our past essentially through the unmasking of lies and dis- and misinformation. This came to be the cornerstone of the way in which South Africans not only perceived one another but it also divided us to the extent that the violation of human rights became an accepted way of going about our daily lives. It is therefore important that not only the product of the TRC gives us truth and transparency but also that the way in which the commission goes about their tasks, personifies transparency and openness. (RR Newsletter 01-02/96)

The TRC is in its final stages of planning the first hearings and still many South Africans have not been part of discussions on the issues of justice, truth and reconciliation. Nor have the implications of a truth and reconciliation commission vis-à-vis a truth and justice commission been part of the debates of ordinary people. ... Furthermore it is important that political leaders communicate the implications and realities of the negotiated settlement with their followers. The compromises, sacrifices and gains needs to be clarified. If this process of informing and educating does not happen the negotiated compromise and very nature of the South Africa reality after 1994 might lead to further dissatisfaction and people feeling being sold out. (RR Newsletter 02-03/96)

The Forums

When the RR transformed from a civil campaign into the Centre for Ubuntu the forums continued as the most consistent activity of the process over the next three years. As such they mark one of the most important contributions of the initiative to the discourse around truth and reconciliation in the Western Cape. There have been few public forums where people came together and discussed the meaning and the implications of themes like 'dealing with the past', 'healing', 'reconciliation', 'restorative justice' and 'reparations' in a communal and individual context. A range of people attended the forum meetings including former anti-apartheid activists, 'victims' and survivors of apartheid human rights violations (who did or did not testify to the TRC), former participants of Healing of Memories workshops and members from various churches and other faith communities.⁷ At their best, the forum meetings offered a space for intellectual and political debate as well as personal comment and at times reflection, ritual and prayer. Conflicts around the mission and purpose of the campaign were acted out in discussions, for example around the idea of *religion* in the *Religious Response*:

If we focus on religion as the motivation for what we are doing, we seem to have a choice. It can either be a mere reflex of religious activity, or an integrated spiritual response, which is true to its name at every level of its operation. The unique essence of our campaign is certainly the spirituality it fosters: a responsible and compassionate awareness to the realities of our past and present, deeply rooted in hope. This should determine our contribution. (RR Newsletter 06-07/96 and field notes)

At the forums, there existed - among a changing audience - a core group of long-term participants who formed relationships among each other and engaged actively in the process.

Journal Entry 1999:

This is a forum meeting that will stay in my mind. Maybe because it was so small and yet so important, maybe because of the people there, their genuine spirit and their resolve not to give up, to make this country work. I had spent the afternoon with a colleague whose contribution to the struggle at a very young age has made him who he is today, resilient and fragile, on the edge but never giving up. We go together to the Centre's meeting place, a church hall in Mowbray. Wilhelm Verwoerd is there, speaking about the Truth Commission through the eyes of South African cartoonists.⁸ He juxtaposes the illustrations in Afrikaans and English newspapers in insightful ways. How many realities co-exist in this place But he urges that no community should be left out of the process of engaging with the past, painful as it may seem, to invest even more energy into drawing those on board who already seem so privileged. After the talk there are critical responses. It strikes me how important this ground is to meet and challenge each other. The evening ends with a small ceremony. We stand in a circle and Jeanne Rogers, the convenor of the Centre, has brought candles. 'Lights of hope' she says and laughs. We hold hands as Ma Irene Mxinwa, whose son was shot by the security police in 1986, lights the candle of Wilhelm Verwoerd, grandson of one of the architects of apartheid. It is a moving moment, a spark of feeling

togetherness and a common spirit among all the diverse opinions. Maybe this is reconciliation, a momentary gesture, a glimpse of how it could be.

As with most activities that aim to draw people from different social backgrounds and areas of Cape Town to one event, the question of space was also an important one for the forums. According to the venue where a forum was held, different people had the means and mind to attend. This phenomenon points to the still present spatial segregation of Cape Town where many people do not travel across former historical boundaries due to lack of means and transport on the one hand, and due to insecurity and fear for safety on the other. When at their best, the forums did not just manage to get people from different backgrounds to engage with each other and with the issues at stake, but in some cases motivated a crossing of boundaries when people drove each other home afterwards and ventured into 'unknown territories'. This also brought home the realities of the 'different worlds' that coexist in Cape Town and allowed participants to speak about them.

Most of the forums were attended by between twenty and thirty people. Although the forums only reached a relatively small number of people directly, their impact lay in that they offered and initiated a much-needed space for interaction and debate to those who attended, offering for people from previously segregated backgrounds one more small platform to engage with one another. They also had a dissemination effect by offering a meeting place for 'multipliers', people with an interest in creating further processes to meet the needs of apartheid survivors and to address relevant post-TRC questions in the Western Cape. In this way the initiative served as a stage for producing ideas and stimulating new and old networks, as well as providing an opportunity for thought, debate and interaction around such issues. For example, a number of people who were part of the forums are today engaged in the "Western Cape Reparations Forum", a coalition of NGOs and interested members of civil society initiating a process of lobbying and advocacy around reparations (see also: Colvin 2001). Other members are engaged in lobbying processes such as Gun-free South Africa, the human rights work of the Black Sash and others.

At the same time participants at the forums themselves had asked if they were not running in danger of becoming 'talk-shops', always attended by the same audience, if the Centre's work would not expand its reach (AGM of the Centre for Ubuntu, March 2000, field notes). The possibility that the forums would have only a limited outreach because of the nature of the involved institutions was raised critically at an early stage already by one of the members of the Religious Response:

Do we really have people who actually need us? Who realises the need for a Religious Response to the Truth Commission? So you would have a lot of people saying: the Western Cape Province Council of Churches might have our church leader (who we do not even know) on its Board once every few months. But what is the Religious Response to the Truth Commission? It is a sub-committee somewhere formed in a room one day. So our biggest challenge is to bring this Religious Response and a need for it back to the community, and then to make them aware for the need for reconciliation in this country. Which at many a time is an isolated and an arrogant process because you come back and

you tell a faith community that they need this. (RR member, 9/96)

This comment underlines the need for a critical awareness around the underlying dynamics and power-balances inherent in any process of outreach work in a post-apartheid context. Who is in need of healing, of reconciliation, or seen to be in need? Who provides 'healing services' for whom and why? Who has the access and opportunity to participate in debates, to generate processes, and to raise the necessary funds? It continues to be relevant for the creation of 'healing' and 'reconciliation' interventions to ask about the implications of the structural and psychological continuities of apartheid in such processes and to remain aware of the ethical implications of interventions led by NGOs and other institutions.

In this context lies also one of the key discussions within the Religious Response initially: Should the campaign see itself as networking process that would reach communities via their church leaders or work with a direct community focus? Part of working with the leadership structures had been via the connections to the WCPCC and SACC.⁹ At the same time members of the campaign questioned if an exclusive focus on such structures would not result in the exclusion of a range of communities and individuals, for instance those opposed to the idea of reconciliation as such (field notes 1997).

Children and Youth Workshops

Prompted by the experiences with younger participants at Healing of Memories workshops and discussions among the HOM facilitators, the question arose: How can the apartheid experience be conveyed to younger people who have not been an immediate part of the system but who are experiencing its continuities today? Motivated by the input of participants and facilitators of the process, the Centre for Ubuntu began to create a new focus on children and youth. Responses from participants at Healing of Memories workshops had shown that there was little inter-generational dialogue, taking place in families and communities about the apartheid past. Yvette Rogers, co-ordinator of the Centre in 1999 and 2000, explained:

A new generation is already dealing with the legacies of apartheid without knowing where they have come from and without hearing their parents' stories. We hope that by giving the children an opportunity to learn about apartheid as well as speak about their own experiences of South Africa, they will be able to understand themselves better. And they will be able to understand where their parents are coming from. (CFU Co-ordinator, 7/99)

The Centre for Ubuntu tried to address this issue by developing a model for 'children's workshops'. The aim was to teach young South Africans about the apartheid past in a way that would sensitively connect to its relevance and continuity in the present. The first pilot initiative in this regard took place in 1998 when the RR, in collaboration with St George's Cathedral in Cape Town, conducted a day-programme for children (age eight to ten) to learn about the apartheid past. The children learned about aspects of the apartheid system and were led to relate their knowledge of the past to their own experiences in South Africa today. Later the group worked creatively on a dream of 'the new South Africa,' making colourful T-shirts and a 'rainbow banner.' The experience of this day inspired the Centre to further develop a model for a children's workshop using some of the creative elements of the Healing of Memories workshops, but transforming them into a methodology suitable

for children.

The first children's workshops were conducted in 1999 in collaboration with the Quaker Peace Centre. They were one-day workshops with children between age ten to fourteen. After the initial experience with eight to ten year olds in 1998, the facilitators opted for working with children that were older. The main argument for this was the inclusion of a theatre piece as part of the workshop that enacts (some violent) scenes from the apartheid years. The other parts of the workshops offered a creative methodology including storytelling, drawing, finger painting and collages, and song. Participants had been invited through various schools and a children's shelter. The participant groups were varied in terms of age, cultural background, languages and educational experience.

At the same time the work of the Centre raised increasing interest among several secondary schools that invited facilitators of the children's workshops to give short 'reconciliation and diversity workshops' in the classroom. Such activities were conducted over one or two school periods and included creative games, experiential learning methods and discussions with the children about life in South Africa today, their knowledge of apartheid, and their experiences of race and racism. Workshops were held in grades five to nine, in various schools in formerly advantaged 'white areas' and disadvantaged 'black areas'.

Experiences at the workshops showed that interventions with children require carefully trained and skilled facilitators, especially if working with youth at risk and/or traumatised youth. The level of violence that young people, coming from areas, such as the Cape Flats, that were particularly subjected to apartheid violence and grew out of the injustice of forced removals, are exposed to on a daily basis often comes as a shock to those living in more sheltered and affluent areas. Here again, the facilitators become mediators between seemingly incompatible realities.¹⁰ The endeavour of creating a space for meaningful engagement among the youth of Cape Town has to balance the contradictions inherent in the attempt at raising awareness around existing stereotypes without re-enforcing them. This is especially the case when bringing together youths from different schools and from different socio-economic, hence largely still divided and apartheid-defined backgrounds. The question of the appropriate methodologies for different age groups was also brought up and will have to be considered further.¹¹

Even though the projects of children's workshops remained at an early stage of development, the experiences of facilitators and participants raised a number of important questions in post-apartheid and post-TRC South Africa:

- How to reach and teach the next generation about apartheid?
- How to allow children and youth to relate to their parents' experiences and make the connection between the past and present without alienating them or the parents?
- How to let them explore and make sense of the ways in which history is played out at a personal, communal and national level?
- How to develop a creative/experiential learning approach to explore the multiple apartheid consequences that youth are living with today without re-enforcing past and present stereotypes and divisions?
- Can using the knowledge of the past as a vehicle rather than an obstacle convey such a thing as civil responsibility and awareness?

- What does the term 'reconciliation' mean to children and youth?
- Are there other pragmatic concepts besides 'reconciliation' that may be used to address the legacies of apartheid?

Being part of many planning discussions around the workshops my perspective as a young German of the 'third generation' (after the Holocaust) has highlighted the question of inter-generational dialogue in the Centre for Ubuntu's process. Many of the themes I grappled with resonated with the experiences of my younger South African colleagues. The experience of 'the silences of the parents' has played an important role in post-war German family relations (Mitscherlich 1970) and will, undoubtedly, also become more relevant in South Africa as the first post-apartheid generations mature.

The workshops also allowed for an insight into the concerns and realities of young people in Cape Town today. The experiences of the Centre for Ubuntu have shown, that in a rapidly changing society, it will be as much a task for the older generation to listen and learn from the young, as to teach them. This is also relevant for the 'in-between' generation of young South Africans in their early twenties, who have experienced apartheid as children and struggle to put some of their childhood experiences into the framework of a 'rainbow South Africa'. An example would be the young man who told me how traumatised he was by the realisation that the 'fire-games by the river' that him and his friends used to watch as children had in fact been necklace-killings of people perceived to be traitors or informers in his community.

The Centre for Ubuntu stated that one of its aims with the children's workshops has been to encourage young South Africans to dialogue with their parents about the past. In the cases where we could follow-up with the children, one participant stated how she had always thought: 'apartheid has nothing to do with me'. This seems to be a prevalent attitude we heard from many young South Africans born after 1990. When, after the workshop, the girl questioned her mother about the apartheid years, a different perspective emerged. 'All of a sudden I understood a lot better why my mother is so hurt,' she said (quoted by Rogers, 7/1999).

Questions of how to facilitate a sensitive inter-generational dialogue, not limited to the context of family, will become increasingly relevant in a society in transition like South Africa. Initiatives in this regard are complex processes, but at best they can provide, through a personalised engagement with history, one of many bridges needed to cross the experiential gap between the realities of apartheid South Africa and the present South African society.

Interfaith Initiative and District Six Workshops

The Centre's Interfaith Working Group was formed in 1999. It concerned itself with an 'interfaith response' in the Western Cape during and after the time of the TRC's 'faith hearings',¹² hoping to address the role of the churches and faith communities in the province. However, the planned response never took the shape of a local Western Cape faith hearing as the Interfaith Working Group had initially thought. Instead, the work of the group shifted its focus to interfaith relations in District Six and began to explore the issue of forced removals in Cape Town:

Because the faith hearing that was held by the TRC only gave few people a chance to speak, our plan was to hold a faith hearing here in the Western Cape. During the planning process we realised that one of the biggest hurts in the Western Cape had not been subject to a TRC hearing: the forced removals. So we wanted to help those communities to go on a process of healing in which they could reclaim the essence of ubuntu. For example, District Six has been described as such a place, a community of tolerance where different ideas were accepted and different faiths could come together and benefit from each other. (Rogers 7/99)

The most visible shape that the work of the Interfaith-working group of the CFU took was with former residents of the District Six Community in Cape Town.¹³ Several evening forums and workshops were held which allowed the ex-residents to speak of their experiences and express their sentiments about forced removals as one of the fundamental human rights violations of apartheid that had taken place in the Western Cape since the 1960s. Using an adapted version of the Healing of Memories model, these one-day storytelling workshops were held at the District Six Museum. They elicited tremendous positive response from the participating former residents who experienced them as a valuable platform to share their stories and commemorate their experiences:¹⁴

The idea was to set aside a day and invite ordinary people to come here [to the District Six museum] and tell their story. Because the forced removals and the bulldozing of the houses was an act of obliteration, not just of losing homes. It was losing the place you identify with. The bulldozers in their effective act of aggression also destroyed the networks of people, their relationships. It was the removal of memory. Our spirituality is connected to our memory and where we come from, here next to the mountain. Healing can come out of remembering and we are speaking ourselves back into this place. (Stan Abrahams, former resident of District Six, 6/99)

Journal Entry 1997:

The Centre for Ubuntu has organised an evening at the District Six museum. We are gathered with a group of about twelve people in the old Slave Church in Buitenkant Street. Father Michael Lapsley and Stan Abrahams, one of the former residents of District Six, open with a small prayer ceremony. Afterwards Stan shows us his slides that he kept from District Six. Faded in their Seventies colours, they nonetheless have great magic, the powers of evoking vivid memories. Like in a time warp we are drawn into the streets of the old District. We look at Stan's house, we walk down De Villier's Street, the school, the playground where today the Cape Technikon looms - only now does its monstrosity become apparent, do we learn what is buried underneath the concrete. Moments of nostalgia? But when the lights come back on, there is a buzz in the audience. In small groups people begin to speak about their experiences during the apartheid years, the pain and violation of forced removals emerges in human detail, in the memory of a favourite streetcorner or the vivid description of the Coons marching down Hanover street. Life in the District becomes real in the individual stories. Too short the time for all the memories that flood back into this

space. I go out into the night and see the city with new eyes.

Concluding Comments

During the life span of the Religious Response and the Centre for Ubuntu, the initiative has seen a number of dynamics and changes. Starting out as a civil campaign that was aimed at being a parallel process to the TRC, seeking to publicise, support and monitor the Commission, it grew into an organisation that developed active intervention models for healing and reconciliation. The activities could address some of the needs of individuals and groups emerging in the process that the TRC could not meet, such as offering additional opportunities for people to speak about their memories and forums to debate related issues. The Centre's exploration of more future-oriented work with youth and children adds to its relevance at a time when other subjects may increasingly replace History as a school subject. Meanwhile questions related to historically based racism and the challenges of promoting the concept of diversity in schools have not ceased to play a role for young people who have a daily experience of the continuities of apartheid.

As such, the Centre for Ubuntu's process has contributed to (and sometimes been ahead of) current discourses around the consequences of apartheid in the context of the Western Cape. On a small but consistent scale it has brought together people of different faiths, from different apartheid engineered social backgrounds and from different geographical areas of Cape Town in order to engage them in thought and debate around the local future of South Africa's new democracy. In the beginning, members of the Muslim, Hindu and Jewish community actively took part in the Religious Response, but this has remained at the level of individual engagement. The initiative has remained largely driven by members of the Christian faith, which may be related to its institutional affiliations and origins, as well as the complex dynamics of interaction among different religious institutions as well as between religious and non-religious organisations.

The activities of the Centre have been important to those individuals and communities they reached. Attempts at enlarging the network and drawing a greater number of institutions into the process did not develop to the extent that the initiative had hoped. The question of outreach and target audiences raised by a member of the Religious Response in 1996 has remained:

Traditionally faith communities work like this. They want spiritual things and also activities for social justice. And so they form sub-committees. But the sub-committee for the Religious Response [in an individual congregation] would not be a body, which is empowered by the faith communities. It [exists] to be politically correct and to be involved. But their real energy we do not get and we are not a priority on their list, we are not. So I am just saying that that is the difficulty of a Campaign like this to get past being a very individualistic thing. That is the main problem. (RR member, 9/96)

The part of the RR/CFU's process that concerned itself with issues immediately related to the work of the TRC ended after it had extended for about a year beyond the Commission's ending. The goal of the original campaign to continue beyond the life span of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission had been met. However, the RR/CFU's original objectives - to contribute towards and facilitate healing, 'reconciliation' and the 'spirit of *ubuntu*' in the Western Cape - did not cease to be relevant in a local context. Often the initiative's philosophy of reconciliation was one of small steps, of appreciating that individuals show the willingness to engage with the difficulties of change and address the conflicts that necessarily will arise. It will remain open whether the intervention work of the CFU and the resources it has created can be integrated into other processes in the future, since the direct intervention work of the Centre has ceased. One of the challenges for the initiatives aiming to work into similar directions will lie in drawing members of other (faith and non-faith) communities into their intervention work if they wish to realise the vision of a broader interfaith process in the Western Cape. It will also be necessary to continue extending the focus of such interventions across sectors and to communities and institutions not related to faith communities such as schools, museums and other NGOs.

Could there have been ways of connecting the RR/CFU to a larger group of people, organisations and institutions in a way that would have turned the campaign into a broader social movement for healing and reconciliation in the Western Cape as the early RR was hoping? (field notes 1996) Surely, the questions that are asked today in the South African process are significantly different from those asked in 1995, taking into account the experience of the TRC, the continued absence of a reparation procedure and other factors. The momentum for such a broad movement has passed and some of the early enthusiasm has given way to disillusionment. Also a number of former members of the RR/CFU mentioned the fact that now other issues stand as, for instance, the development and empowerment of previously disadvantaged communities and individuals are more pressing and more problem-oriented work is needed (Rogers, 2001, field notes). Asking what could be the role of cathartic processes and organisations such as the CFU could be, respondents mentioned that they had increasingly come to the conclusion that they have to integrate their services into larger network structures, marking theirs as one contribution to a larger process of transformation, empowerment and development.

Notes:

¹ At this 'regional conference' (RR Newsletter 7/95) on 27 October 1994, religious leaders, victims of human rights violations and the Ministry of Justice participated.

² The first convenor of the campaign was Barney Beck, then Director at the Quaker Peace Centre.

³ The same group, today, works as part of the Institute for Healing of Memories.

⁴ Between 1995 and 2000 Healing of Memories workshops were attended by a diverse spectrum of people as they were advertised through church and NGO networks in the Western Cape. Many were connected to the TRC process (e.g. survivors and their families; people who chose not to testify at the TRC) and to various faith communities and NGOs.

⁵ A number of volunteers worked for both initiatives, the RR/CFU and the Chaplaincy/IHOM, pursuing the same or similar aims.

⁶ RR Newsletter 8/95

⁷ Initially activities took place that included African Traditional Churches as well as Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders. In the long-term members of Christian faith mainly drove the initiative.

⁸ These ideas have since been published. See Verwoerd (2000)

⁹ The Healing of Memories process has been integrated as part of the South African Council of Churches (SACC)'s programme since 1997, training church ministers and pastoral counsellors in the workshop methodology and facilitation.

¹⁰ This facet has also been pointed out as a challenge in facilitating the Healing of Memories workshops. See Kayser (2000).

¹¹ The Centre for Ubuntu's partner organisation, the Institute for Healing of Memories, has recently created a 'Youth Programme' for participants between 15-18 years. The idea is to engage teenagers in a process of exploring their own and their country's past as well as the links between their past and present experiences in South Africa.

¹² The TRC faith hearings were part of the Institutional Hearings that the Commission held to explore the role of different sectors of society during apartheid. The TRC faith hearings took place in East London in 1998.

¹³ The choice to work with the District Six community was mainly related to individual relations between members of the Centre for Ubuntu and members of the District Six Beneficiary Trust.

¹⁴ For more information see video production: Kayser (1999)

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(26 September 1996) Member, Religious Response. Interview with Lars Buur, Cape Town.

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