



steve biko
foundation

SYMPOSIUM: ‘Memory in a time of freedom’

Hosted by District Six Museum (D6M) and Steve Biko Foundation (SBF)

Friday 23 – Saturday 24 October 2015

WHAT IS THE SYMPOSIUM ABOUT?

District Six Museum and the Steve Biko Foundation are jointly facilitating a multi-disciplinary symposium to explore the status and nature of memorialisation in our 21st year of ‘freedom’. This symposium will provide a platform for scholars, community-based activists, expressive artists, designers, policy influencers, youth, amongst others, to reflect on various notions of freedom and restitution. The symposium will take the form of critical appraisals over two days with the aim of bringing into sharp relief the key initiatives since 1994 that have either entrenched or started reversing colonial and apartheid legacies of inequality, racism and marginalisation. We will reflect on this in relation to memorialisation and its important role in imagining an egalitarian future.

WHAT THEMES WILL WE EXPLORE?

1. Re-imagining divided and unequal cities – cultural geographies of racial and class identity;
2. Race, identity and voice – mediating popular and difficult discourses on difference, diversity, multi-culturalism, ethnicity, gender and class;
3. Stories of hope, social justice and a vision for a new humanity.

The symposium will consist of mediated panel discussions, workshop sessions and presentations in a register that encourages participation across multiple experiences (community organisation, university, research institution, public spaces and projects, etc).

IN THE SESSIONS WE AIM TO encourage reflections on the role of memory projects as places to connect, enact and sharpen acts of participatory democracy in two spheres:

1. the collective reconstruction of a past that makes visible what colonialism and Apartheid Laws rendered invisible;
2. the application of important lessons from the past in the present to strengthen grassroots agency and democracy;

How do we develop this into a codified body of practice for community-based organisations to use as a tool for developing our coherent voice in ‘a time of freedom’?

Overview of sessions

INTRODUCTORY SESSION: The challenges of memory

Contrary to expectations, memory projects seem to be under constant threat in the work of keeping memory alive in this post-Apartheid period. Finding the funding to keep the work going is a large challenge, and the severity of the dearth of funding for memory work tends to mask the other issues that are as detrimental to the work of memory. Some of the challenges are common and universal, others are unique and contextually-based; some are easily apparent while others are more tacit and only observable through analytical hindsight. What are these challenges; how do we name them? How can we support each other in confronting these challenges and how can we read our changing external environments in order to anticipate new ones?

The introductory session will feature a panel consisting of representatives from a number of sites around the country. They are not representative of the full range of communities and geographies but they represent a sampling. They have been asked to participate on a panel, where they will be given 10 minutes to identify one of the main challenges that they continue to face in the course of their work. The following is an extract from the brief sent to potential participants:

*We would like to start the symposium with a panel composed of people representing various projects or sites of memory. We would like to kick-start with thinking about the many challenges that we face in trying to preserve and protect the memory of elements of our traumatic and also triumphant pasts. But we all know that there are many challenges. Some of these have been funding, others have been community frustrations, government buy-in, etc – to name but a few. The story of **XXX** is such an important part of our national memory, and I am sure that we can benefit from learning about some of your many challenges.*

We hope that we can emerge from this process with a more comprehensive view of what many projects face. The picture will not be complete, but it will not be complete but it will represent a sampling.

THEME 1: Re-imagining a divided and unequal city: cultural geographies of racial and class identity

District Six, seen as an icon of forced removals, was by no means an isolated case. The country we have today was spatially designed through laws and urbanisation policies that systematically racialized and displaced millions to the peripheries of our cities. After twenty one years of democracy, Cape Town seems to have become even more divided by race and class. These inequities are clearly visible to any visitor to this city with deep acts of anger frequently bubbling to the surface. The smouldering remains of colonialism and apartheid always threatening to burst into full flame is fuelled by a contemporary urbanisation trajectory that largely favours the needs and desires of the rich and aspirant wealthy in society. Urban planning seems to reflect amnesia about the recent history of the Pass Laws (influx control) and Group Areas Act that have left us with deep wounds in this divided city. With the ongoing displacement of working class people to the periphery of the city, what role does memory and memorialisation have to play in the development of a more humane society?

This session aims to workshop the way collective memory and a deepening of historical consciousness can help us to strengthen a participatory democracy approach to issues of contemporary urbanisation including memorialisation processes. Through mapping the links between legacies of the past and current development initiatives in this city (government, civil society, and research) we hope to confront important questions about urban planning: for whom and by whom? Who belongs in this city - insiders and outsiders? What have we learnt from our past? What do we desire to become - as a city? How do we build alliances between those doing memorialisation and community based initiatives that promote active citizenship / participatory democracy?

THEME 2: Race, identity and voice

The invisible ceilings in our divided cities are palpable – with some cities in our country presenting themselves as more divided than others. As some people move through spaces with a measure of confidence and familiarity derived from a past of accessibility, they exude a spirit of entitlement and exclusivity; as others attempt to engage with spaces from which they were previously excluded, they struggle to do so with a measure of belonging. We need to hear each others' stories. We need to become aware of our own behaviours. We need to enrich each others' access to spaces of belonging on a personal, communal and policy level. We need to understand what role 'race' still places in our ability to move fluidly through spaces. We need to own, affirm and understand our own identities and be confident about sharing them. We need to own our voices and acknowledge the rights of others to own theirs, in ways which speak to each other and do not exclude each other. And we need to actively support the creation of spaces for the telling of and listening to each others' stories.

THEME 3: Stories of hope, social justice and a vision for a new humanity

One of the framing values of the land restitution process has been the need to restore 'dignity' to people and to bring about social justice for communities. Together with a general 'turn' toward local and community histories, a number of memorial projects have emerged in the past twenty years, but are now faced with the challenges of building memorial projects as a task of social justice: creating equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities for all. This session aims to contextualise memorialisation concerns and issues within the context of land restitution and ongoing heritage initiatives. It invites existing community claimant groups, projects, private and civil society initiatives, who see work with memory as a form of justice and restoration of dignity, to raise what the challenges have been both on a critical, but also practical level.

[REGISTER](#)

[FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)

or call Zahra Hendricks on 4667200 (during office hours)