

# HEALING THE WOUNDS OF SLAVE TRADE & SLAVERY

## APPROACHES AND PRACTICES: A DESK REVIEW

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The Slave Route:  
Resistance, Liberty, Heritage

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FOR PEACE

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# Foreword

The links between systemic and transgenerational processes of physical and psychological violence and their traumatic effects have not historically been fully recognised by the scientific community. But in recent years, innovative research in psychology, cognitive psychology and epigenetics has highlighted that not only can traumatic stress modify behaviour, cognition and psychological functioning, but that many of these effects can be transmitted to subsequent generations. Significantly this transmission can occur even when individuals are not exposed to any new traumatic stressor; a traumatic event one has not directly experienced can have psychological and social impacts on one's life.

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*The violence of slavery did not end with abolition.*

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These new areas of research, which have mainly been developed in the context of Holocaust studies, enable us to make a heuristic distinction between personal trauma and collective or transgenerational trauma. Conceptually speaking, the notion of trauma can now be mobilised as a tool that captures the collective experience and how it can express itself through a person, and these ideas are now being applied to survivors and descendants of other chapters of extreme historical violence in human history.

Such research serves to remind us that the past is always embedded in the present, not only externally (in the social world and the artefacts all around us) but also internally (in our psyche and the way our DNA interacts with the environment). Communities carry the history of catastrophic events and their consequences, not only as the content of their DNA, but also as part of their representation of life in general and the way they remember history. It also opens the possibility of a deep questioning into the consequences of collective traumas and the 'naturalisation' of pathological functioning expressed in pathological frameworks structured by the disaster itself.

For the UNESCO Slave Route Project, the challenge is extending this approach to acknowledge the impacts of postcolonial cognitive dissonance, and to develop a 'healing map' to better understand how to heal the persons and communities impacted intergenerationally and the structures of social and economic inequalities founded on historic wrongdoing. Following a two-

year collaboration between the UNESCO Slave Route Project and the GHFP Research Institute, supported by Georgetown University, this Desk Review Report aims to capture, map and analyse conceptions and approaches to healing mass traumas such as the wounds of trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery.

According to the different studies published by the UNESCO Slave Route project, slavery should be understood as a process of violence and terror aimed at compelling 'black bodies' to accept dehumanising conditions of work and life, with the intention of transforming human beings into commodities. Violence has been a core ingredient throughout this process, from the kidnaping in the African continent, to the deportation of captives through the middle passage, to the everyday physical and psychological violence of enslaved life. Violence against enslaved people was normalised and involved slave owners, non-slaveholders and public authorities. Such violence has a function: it creates a climate of chronic fear and demands submission of enslaved bodies. The regime of terror produced by slavery on people of African descent for close to three long centuries has generated grievous traumatic stresses, which in turn have been transmitted to subsequent generations.

The violence of slavery did not end with abolition. Its contemporary consequences are still active in the form of the terrible poison of racism that continues to contaminate societies. Even today, racism kills, discriminates and humiliates. Despite international conventions, despite national laws, millions of men, women and children continue to suffer from racism and discrimination. Beyond the physical violence that continues to exist, most of the violence carried by the slavery system has taken new, less obvious forms. This violence has been embodied in the structures and functioning of societies themselves, excluding people of African descent from the space of a full citizenship (fair treatment in terms of education, employment, access to justice, health, housing, etc.). The current social environment, still hostile, does not allow people of African descent to heal from these traumas. On

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*Despite international conventions, despite national laws, millions continue to suffer from racism and discrimination.*

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the contrary, the ghost of slavery continues to expose those people to micro traumatic stresses due to everyday and structural racism that reinforces transgenerational traumas.

To properly address the issue of Healing the Wounds of Slave Trade and Slavery, a double effort must be made, both 'internally' and 'externally'. The healing required is not something that can be solved in a clinical sense alone, because it also demands social justice. The concept of restorative justice, rooted in indigenous principles, resonates strongly with the perspectives developed in the Desk Review. It emphasises the need to bring together everyone affected by a wrongdoing to address the need and the responsibilities and to heal this trauma. The trauma needs to be addressed at a personal level, but must also be articulated with structural changes, such as revisions of laws, to prevent institutionalised dehumanisation, and the development of global affirmative action to address inequalities inherited from slavery and reinforced by structural racism.

This work invites us to mobilise memory not as an object but as an action (to remember) that resonates in the present and helps us stop the contemporary forces which tend to silence the echoes of the past. Further, an understanding of collective trauma may enable us to see beyond a false opposition between history and memory, seeing memory as the way our (accurate or otherwise) representation of history structures our relationship with the present.

We must conceive of slavery, and its intrinsic violence and traumatic nature, not as a single (traumatic) event, but as a continuous chain of intergenerational traumatic events that span nearly three centuries. Furthermore, it is important to add that the abolition of slavery did not

end the violence against 'black bodies'; it only modified the legal status of the enslaved, still without giving them a space for full citizenship.

Professor Achille Mbembe reminds us that:

The imperative to 'deracialise' is ... valid for Europe, for the United States, for Brazil and for other parts of the world. The emergence of new varieties of racism in Europe and elsewhere, the reassertion of global white supremacy, of populism and retro-nationalism, the weaponization of difference and identity are not only symptoms of a deep distrust of the world. They are also fostered by transnational forces capable of making that same world inhospitable, uninhabitable and unbreathable for many of us. (Bangstad and Tumyr, 2019)

In a world structured by racism, which expresses itself through hatred, violence, injustices and destruction, Africans and people of African descent are not the only losers. Living in such a world adversely affects even the people who naively think that they are benefitting from the situation.

For UNESCO, this undertaking to heal the present and engage humanity towards a better future, is necessary not only for people of African descent and Africans, but is just as imperative for the descendants of slave owners. Thus, we may start a collective healing process in order to become dignified human beings.

Tabue Nguma  
UNESCO Slave Route Project  
Paris, December 2020





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# Executive Summary

This Report encapsulates the key findings of a Desk Review undertaken as part of the UNESCO Slave Route Project and the GHFP Research Institute's partnership. The Review was intended to explore major approaches to and practices of healing in the context of the wounds and traumas which resulted from the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery.

The Desk Review draws on a conception of healing wounds that perceives the wounds of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery as dehumanisation. This in turn highlights the imperative of healing as addressing dehumanisation from four processes: Process One is directed at dehumanising acts *per se*; Process Two is directed at the traumatic effects of being dehumanised; Process Three is directed at the dehumanising relationships; and Process Four is directed at the structural conditions that have enabled institutionalised dehumanisation. In reviewing relevant literature and case studies, the Desk Review has been able to map out some of the key practical approaches to healing.

For Process One, this Report proposes that public acknowledgement and apologies for the dehumanisation involved in slave trade and slavery are important, especially when accompanied by genuine expressions of atonement, commitments to reparation, and state-initiated processes of Truth and Reconciliation. National leadership, dedicated finance, and the participation of people from both African and European descent are essential for Process One.

With regard to Process Two, this Review has identified a wealth of healing practices that are meaningful in addressing the effects of being dehumanised. These healing approaches are oriented towards four key aims: remembering and commemorating; making sense of trauma and separating one's personhood from the effects

of trauma; reconnecting to human dignity; and restoring human spirit and a sense of wholeness.

Regarding Process Three, this Review has brought to light a rich array of practices concerning healing relationships and interpersonal reconciliation. It proposes five key areas to focus healing practices. These are transcending binaries; reaffirming meaningful narratives; forgiveness and reconciliation; building trust; and co-action. In addition to creating safe spaces, caring facilitation, respectful listening, deep dialogue, and joint activities, this Review also maintains that truly effective, enduring and meaningful healing initiatives are those that are integrated at all levels in a community, from small groups to local governance process.

Concerning Process Four, this Review points to four domains of transformation which may address the conditions of structural dehumanisation. These are history education, legislative reforms, economic institutions, and education and public health systems. This Review raises the importance of dialogue as a major approach that invites all actors within communities to discuss these four domains of transformation.

Based on the overall findings of the Review, we envisage that the next steps of the UNESCO Slave Route Project would include the design of a Handbook on Healing the Wounds of Slavery, including ideas for experiential group-based healing workshops rooted in relevant communities that have been impacted by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery. The proposed Handbook will contain a flexible portfolio of healing activities, with proposals for different modules to be tailored to specific contexts and regions. The Handbook will provide guidelines and resources for facilitators who would be trained to support activities and experiential workshops aimed at collective healing.

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*'One of the widest spread and most damaging legacies of the slave trade is racism, institutionalised, cultural and structural, which has repercussions on all continents of our planet, as the basis of xenophobia, discrimination, prejudice and dehumanisation.'*

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I

# BACKGROUND

RICHMOND SLAVE TRAIL COMMISSION  
RECONCILIATION STATUE UNVEILING  
2007

RICHMOND SLAVE TRAIL COMMISSION  
RECONCILIATION STATUE UNVEILING

RICHMOND SLAVE TRAIL COMMISSION



Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, approximately 28 million healthy African men and women were captured from their homes and forced to march across their homeland to the sea, where slave ships awaited to transport them across the Atlantic to the Western Hemisphere. Shackled in pairs with metal chains around their ankles and ropes around their necks, and subjected to violence and abuse, approximately half of the men and women perished on these forced marches. Of the 14 million who made it to the African coast, only two thirds survived the 5000-mile voyage, lasting one to three months, in the inhumanly cramped and disease-ridden hold of a ship (Curtain, 1969). Many died of starvation, dysentery, and suicide. The remaining 7.4 million Africans, upon arrival in the Americas and the Caribbean, were sold into slavery; half were to die of disease, hunger, exposure, overwork and brutality (Sweet, 2003; Bowser et al., forthcoming).

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*Of the 14 million who made it to the African coast, only two thirds survived the 5000-mile voyage.*

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This mass atrocity, referred to by some Africans and African Americans as *the Maafa*, a Kiswahili term for great trauma, has been understood as the longest and most extensive genocide in human history (Witmann, 2016; Bowser et al., forthcoming). In addition to the physical and psychological harms inflicted by the inhumane treatment, enslaved Africans also suffered cultural trauma by being forcibly removed from their homelands, and being forbidden to continue their cultural rituals and practices (Koh, 2019). This cultural trauma has marked legacies in today's African American communities, as attempts have been made to recognise, re-energise, re-interpret and re-legitimise some of the African cultures and traditions.

This historic trauma has left lasting legacies beyond what was experienced directly by those Africans who were captured and enslaved, and their descendants. These legacies are perhaps most evident in contemporary Africa. When European and African slave traders sought to capture African men and women who were at their prime, especially the physically fit and healthy, they left behind the elderly, the disabled and the vulnerable (Lewis, 2020). The impact of this, alongside the culture of fear and insecurity due to the centuries of violent slave trade, as well as ongoing colonisation, imperialism and socio-economic exploitation and deprivation, contributed to the continuing political and economic challenges encountered by most African countries (Deveau, 1997). Equally, the status of a person's family lineage (enslaved or otherwise) remains a divisive factor in some African communities today (ibid.). Additionally, the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as 'tenacious poison, ... [had]



Group of African (?) men, women and children captured in order to become slaves. Lithograph, ca. 1880. Credit: Wellcome Collection, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/yr4nqqew>. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

paved the way for new forms of slavery that continue to affect millions' (UKRI, 2020). It is estimated that over 6 million people are currently subjugated to forms of 'modern slavery' in sub-Saharan Africa.

One of the widest spread and most damaging legacies of the slave trade is racism, institutionalised, cultural and structural, which has repercussions on all continents of our planet, as the basis of xenophobia, discrimination, prejudice and dehumanisation. Racism is the consequence of a prefabricated 'myth of race'; which was used to allow atrocities to be committed throughout the slave trade and slavery (Smedley et al., 2020). Nearly 200 years after Haiti formally abolished slavery in 1804, and over 100 years since Brazil, the last nation to formally abolish slavery did so in 1888, people of African descent living outside of the African continent have continued to experience racism in many different guises.



To help eradicate racism, it is necessary to have an understanding of what is meant by healing and to be prepared to explore and act on approaches to healing the wounds left by the slave trade and slavery. Equally, it is imperative to address the legacies left by this history and its roots. Any attempts to meet the contemporary healing needs must consider these historic dehumanising acts and attendant wounds, but also racism and the structural violence pertaining to part of our global economic system.

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*One of the most damaging legacies is racism, institutionalised, cultural and structural.*

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It was against this background that the GHFP Research Institute<sup>1</sup> launched this Desk Review research, under the

guidance of a Task Force<sup>2</sup> set up by the UNESCO Slave Route Project,<sup>3</sup> in collaboration with the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University.<sup>4</sup> A multilingual and multi-ethnic research team worked on the Desk Review.<sup>5</sup>

The research was carried out in two steps. The first was a conceptual inquiry directed to the question: in the context of trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery, 'How should we understand healing wounds?' In answering, the team conceived wounds and wounding as dehumanisation and violation of one's dignity as a human being. The conceptual exploration was captured in a separate report entitled: *Healing Wounds: A Conceptual Understanding* (Gill and Thomson, 2019b), which has served as a theoretical compass for the Desk Review. The second step involved reviewing relevant literature, concentrating on healing pertaining to mass atrocities, using keywords 'healing' and associated cognates, including recovering, restoring, reparation, reconciliation, repairing, and atoning. Other keywords



*Healing the Wounds of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery: International Symposium, October 2018, Georgetown, Washington, DC.*

- 1 The GHFP Research Institute's lead researchers are Dr Scherto Gill and Prof. Garrett Thomson.
- 2 Task Force experts include: Prof. Benjamin Bowser, Katrina Browne, Rob Corcoran, Dr Joy DeGruy, Prof. John Franklin, Dr Ali Moussa Iye, Dr Margaret Smith, Joe Louis Washington, Dr Erika Wilkins and Prof. George Woods.
- 3 Formerly led by Dr Ali Moussa Iye who initiated this healing programme and now directed by Tabue Nguma.
- 4 The Georgetown University's lead researcher is Prof. Katherine Marshall, supported by Ruth Gopin and Micah Musser.
- 5 The research team consists of four researchers and research assistants: Malik Hearst (Wooster College), Alice McCarthy Sommerville (GHFP), Dr Eric Ndushabandi (Rwanda Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace) and Emilia Soto Echeverri (University of Sussex).

concerned the notions of ‘wounds’ and ‘wounding’, such as dehumanisation, trauma, harm, injustice, racism, discrimination and oppression. The researchers examined books and journal articles, relevant field-based reports and other online resources.

This research explored forms of wounding linked to the slave trade and slavery that either have not been healed or continue to be inflicted, and reviewed purposeful work that is being carried out towards healing such wounds. It also drew on a range of examples of healing practices from other similar contexts of mass atrocity, highlighting the parallels that might suggest learning, drawing on strengths and weaknesses of the myriad attempts at healing. We were mindful throughout this process that, whilst there may be similarities and overlaps between these contexts – for instance, the wounding from the holocaust, the genocide of Aboriginal people, and Truth and Reconciliation Commission following South Africa’s apartheid regime – there will be aspects that are unique to the genocide, ongoing trauma and the legacies of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. This not only concerns the sheer number of people involved over many centuries, including people of both African and European descents, but is also due to the fact that dehumanising narratives, structural violence and institutionalised racism have continued to evolve, with aspects that are deeply embedded in the very fabric of many Western societies. As a result, individuals and communities have few reference points to a time before the atrocities began, particularly in the United States, where slave history has indeed shaped its moral foundations as a nation. The question of how huge parts of the world can heal, more than 400 years on, may be impossible to unravel.

This Review concludes with suggestions that the UNESCO Slave Route Project might consider as the basis to identify key elements of a healing programme, which will be developed, following this research, by the partners of the UNESCO Slave Route Project. Follow-up will include developing guidelines for facilitators of a healing programme. Resulting programmes will be piloted in relevant communities in the Americas, before being introduced to other parts of the world affected by mass atrocities, including the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery, other forms of large-scale violence and political oppression.

The research and writing for this report were finalised in the first half of 2020. Since this time humanity has been confronted with unprecedented global turmoil, with the arrival COVID-19. An important feature has been the disproportionate impact of both the pandemic and resulting public health measures on vulnerable and oppressed communities (Elwell-Sutton et al., 2020). These echo findings about the deep reality of lingering effects of racism. The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has, similarly, raised public awareness that effects of the continuous collective traumas following trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery are very much alive today. Capturing the rich diversity of emergent international BLM initiatives and actions fell outside the time frame of the review, but it bears emphasis that calls for public acknowledgement and atonement for slave trade and slavery and collective healing come high on moral and practical contemporary agendas. Likewise calls for systemic transformation towards ending structural racism and inequality (BLM, 2020), echo and affirm the findings of this Report.





II

UNDERSTANDING  
HEALING WOUNDS:  
A SUMMARY

How should we understand healing wounds in the context of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery? And what might count towards healing? To begin, we argue that ‘healing’ is very much dependent on the notions of wounding and being wounded. In the light of the wounds and legacies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery, it is important that wounding is conceived from multiple levels, as material, economic, socio-psychological, and spiritual harm, as opposed to merely physical damage. Furthermore, the traumatic experiences and continued suffering endured by people of African descent indicate that these are more than historic, and they are the result of continuing widespread institutionalised racism.

Fundamentally, a person is wounded when she is dehumanised or treated as less than fully human. As such, dehumanisation is an element of ill-being, the opposite of dignity and well-being. Whilst dehumanisation commonly consists of material, physical, psycho-social, economic and spiritual harm, it must be understood as something pernicious independently of these harms. In other words, dehumanisation constitutes a violation of the person’s value as a person. Being dehumanised is something that others have done to one, be they a person, a group of people, a community, an institution, a set of cultural practices or a whole system. For instance, insofar as an economic system is based on the maximisation of profit for its own sake, there will be an inherent tendency of such a system towards instrumentalising people, their work and life (including consumption). Here instrumentalisation and dehumanisation are used interchangeably. When a person is instrumentalised or treated solely as a means to an end, she is dehumanised. Dehumanisation is especially harmful concerning one’s relationship to one’s self, as a damage to one’s human dignity and a sense of wholeness in one’s own emotional self-awareness. Dehumanisation equally reflects a violation of human dignity and hence infringes our human rights.

However, despite wounding being conceived as a form of dehumanisation, it can be an error to define healing as the opposite. Healing is not ‘humanising’ *per se* as there cannot be a process of *humanising* a person. This is because we are all already persons of equal intrinsic value or worth, and we cannot be made more so. Instead, through healing, it can be possible for a person to fully recognise her own intrinsic value or worth, and feel and act in accordance with such a recognition. In other words, one cannot humanise the human; one cannot give back to or restore a person her dignity because, being human, she has had her dignity all along. Instead, healing helps the person to (re)connect to her own dignity and restore self-awareness.

A typical interpretation suggests that healing be about making *whole*. This comes from the etymology of the word ‘healing’ which is an Old English word

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*Wounding should be conceived from multiple levels, as material, economic, socio-psychological, and spiritual harm.*

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‘haelan’ meaning ‘whole’. Indeed, dehumanising acts of wounding and their harmful effects can make a person feel fragmented or shattered as if broken, but these are really fragmented emotional self-relations and shattered self-awareness. Dehumanisation is a spiritual harm such that a person may feel disconnected from herself, and perhaps a splintering in her past. In light of this, healing doesn’t make a person whole, but instead, it makes one feel reconnected to oneself as a whole person.

The fact that the wounding of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery has continued until today as dehumanisation in various social guises, including racism, inequality, injustice and white privilege, is important for understanding the intricate relationships between healing and wounding. Structural violence and harm experienced by people of African descent in the Western Hemisphere, such as material poverty, social deprivation, flawed justice systems, and lack of access to quality education, healthcare and housing, must be recognised as, in part, the consequences of this basic type of wounding. The same applies to racism inherent in cultural, political and economic systems and their implications in terms of people’s civic participation. The power dynamics affect especially people’s agency over their own destiny, as well as opportunities to partake in decision-making processes concerning their well-being.

Equally, conceptualising healing through the lenses of wounding as dehumanisation can help us recognise the structural violence at the roots of the slave trade and slavery, and identify ways of addressing these underlying causes, such as laws and legislations. To better understand this systemic nature of healing, we might distinguish between *wounds* that can be treated, and a *disease* to be cured. Whereas psycho-social experiences of suffering are like wounds that need to be treated, for instance, through therapy, reparation or reconciliation, systemic dehumanisation is akin to a disease that requires a cure, such as by identifying inherent structural injustices and ending violent cultural and institutional practices. While healing is primarily focused on addressing psycho-social harms, it should not lose sight of the need for systemic transformation. As we shall see, the latter requires a collective acknowledgement of the moral wrongs of dehumanisation, and the political will to end all forms of violence.



Given our conception of wounding as dehumanisation, we can see that wounding tends to involve four core components:

- (1) The dehumanising act itself performed by an agent/a group of agents;
- (2) The reception of the act, including its traumatic effects;
- (3) The dehumanising relationships that the act expresses and instantiates; and
- (4) The structural and institutional conditions that have permitted the dehumanising act.

This four-fold distinction will allow us to examine traumas and traumatic effects, including historical collective traumas, and locate the wounding and traumas within relevant cultural and institutional practices.

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*Ultimately, healing is a process that addresses the root cause of dehumanisation and remedies its effects.*

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It is clear that being dehumanised is plainly traumatic, and additionally, dehumanisation has harrowing effects. To discuss the relevant traumas and their consequences, we need to make at least three assumptions. First, as we have seen, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery have wrought profound harm and damage on millions of people, their descendants, relevant communities and societies. From this, we can assume that such traumas and their effects are not purely individualistic. They are also collective and cultural. Second, we can assume that racism, in a broad sense of the term, is among these effects. This means that there is a set of causal relations linking the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery to contemporary racism, including racism in the aforementioned forms. Third, we shall assume that these harms and injuries are

not limited to the damage inflicted to the descendants of the enslaved Africans, but also include the harmful effects on the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the slave trade and their descendants, as well as society as a whole. All three assumptions can help us examine the possibilities of healing.

Indeed, any healing endeavours and processes must simultaneously be directed as much as possible towards these four aspects of dehumanisation. As we shall illustrate, these would necessarily include: acknowledging the acts of wounding, alleviating the traumatic and harmful effects, restoring the interrupted relationships caused by the harms, and addressing the root causes of dehumanisation. In this sense, healing ought to address the four components of wounding as follows:

**Process One:** directed at dehumanising acts *per se*;

**Process Two:** directed at the (traumatic and harmful) effects of being dehumanised;

**Process Three:** directed at the relevant dehumanising relationships;

**Process Four:** directed at the structural conditions that have enabled dehumanisation.

In addition, each healing process involves a preparatory contextualisation, such as an investigation or an examination of specific events and their relevant historical contexts that led to the atrocity. Such analysis and explanation is essential to acknowledging the acts of wounding, understanding the harms they cause and identifying the roots of structural violence.

Ultimately, healing is a process that addresses the root cause of dehumanisation and remedies its effects. It also includes recognising the structural conditions that dehumanise. As we shall see, such processes comprise cognitive, emotional, relational and spiritual engagements in which, among other things, people directly experience each other's humanity.

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*'Common features of community healing processes include: safe and inclusive spaces; an openness to encounter; remembering and re-storying; deep dialogue; artistic and creative experiences; collaborative activities; and purposeful educational initiatives.'*

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III

INTRODUCTION TO  
THE DESK REVIEW



The Desk Review was a team effort involving researchers and research assistants from Europe, Africa, South America and North America. The search was conducted in English, French and Spanish to analyse healing approaches and practices, especially in the context of mass atrocities such as genocide, ethnic cleansing and the colonisation of indigenous people. Because of burgeoning community-based initiatives, we extended the search to include websites, field reports and other online resources.

We distinguished between individual and communal approaches to healing. Although the two are interrelated, healing is often regarded as the responsibility of, and for the benefit of, the individual, rather than as part of a societal process. This individualistic approach can fail to acknowledge both structural dehumanisation and the fact that systemic transformation is necessary for people to heal and to flourish. This recognition prompted us to pay special attention to communal approaches to collective healing rather than merely individual healing.

The word 'healing' is intended in a broad sense to include processes that cover intergenerational wounds, as well as the recuperation and alleviation of societal harms. Often, the term 'healing' entails curative processes *after* the wounding has stopped. In this case, however, the wounding continues, and so we must seek healing practices that are consistent with this. Furthermore, we don't assume that all wounds can be healed. Clearly, healing requires systemic reforms and structural transformations, which might not happen soon. Harm can be permanent and the past cannot be changed. Therefore, the review needs to be attentive to healing processes that recognise their own limitations.

During the research, it emerged that the four healing processes identified in the Conceptual Understanding cannot be implemented with consistent quality nor with equal emphasis. For instance, Process One tends to consist mostly in the formal apologies of national leaders. There are few examples from countries directly involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery where national leaders acknowledge the moral wrongs of the dehumanising acts. Thus, we explored cases such as Georgetown University's apologies and atonement for their involvement in holding slaves and profiting from slave trade, as well as the Australian and New Zealand governments' public apologies for their maltreatment of indigenous people. However, in general, unlike in Germany's ongoing confrontation of its Nazi past and New Zealand's approach to healing the past atrocities inflicted on the Māori people, such approaches have not always been supported by meaningful structural reforms.

Additionally, healing directed at the dehumanising acts (Process One) does not always lead to such powerful

experiences among the participants as healing at a relational level (Process Three). Equally, approaches and practices in Process Two (directed at the traumatic effects of dehumanisation) tend to be less well developed in comparison to those of Process Three (directed at the humanising relationships).

With regard to Process Four, despite the efforts of many NGOs, advocacy groups and government bodies, healing at the systemic level is yet to be realised. Structural dehumanisation prevails across countries in the Western Hemisphere, from educational systems, to economic processes; from public health, to employment laws; from neighbourhood development, to family laws; from historical narratives, to public war monuments. Therefore, for this part of the report, our focus is to highlight the imperative of healing at a systemic level.

In contrast to the national and structural processes, local grassroots approaches identified in this Review tend to be more sophisticated and imaginative and are directed towards both the harms and the dehumanising relationships resulting from abuse and exploitation. Some emerge from psycho-social frameworks, such as the Circle of Sharing practised by the Healing the Wounds of History Programme, and constructive therapy of the Playback Theatre. Some are inspired by spiritual practices of forgiveness and compassion, and others by artistic and theatrical participation. There are several community trust-building initiatives, such as Hope in the Cities, launched by Initiatives of Change, that began in Richmond, Virginia, in the United States, as well as the School of Forgiveness and Reconciliation (ESPERE) that is integrated by communities across Latin America and parts of Africa.

Whilst our focus was mainly on reviewing approaches and processes of healing available in the Western Hemisphere, through the guidance of the UNESCO Slave Route Project Task Force, we also paid attention to healing programmes from within Africa itself. This has proven to be challenging, despite its being an important imperative. Nevertheless, this Desk Review has identified a rich array of healing approaches and practices under the four identified processes. Given their diversity, there are underlying common features, rooted mainly in community processes. Here we highlight a few:

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*Local grassroots approaches tend to be more sophisticated and imaginative than national processes.*

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*Safe and inclusive spaces* that enable participants to come as themselves, rather than feeling labelled or judged either by their trauma or their guilt. These spaces are also meaningful in transcending boundaries pre-determined by identity labels.

*An openness to encounter* that creates the inner space for embracing those who are different from ourselves. This openness can be the beginning for rejecting being treated as an object and for new self-identifications that are transcending.

*Remembering and re-storytelling* that allows participants to express the painful experiences, trauma and grievances, which externalises and lets them out. Storytelling involves empathetic non-judgmental listening, which is a sharing of our humanity.

*Deep dialogue* that consists in dialogic processes aimed at mutual understanding. As a starting point, they involve recognition of an injustice and dehumanisation, and then work towards affirming dignity and deepening relationships. They can also help reimagine social conditions and structural peace.

*Artistic and creative experiences* that help channel people's feelings and emotions in a safe and unmediated way. Some traumas are so deep that it would be very difficult for people to articulate how they experience them verbally. Arts, music, movements and other creative activities can provide an outlet when words fail. These processes are safer and less threatening, and less prone to re-traumatising. They offer powerful opportunities for people to separate themselves from the horrors of trauma. Museums and community arts centres are ideal spaces for such processes.

*Collaborative activities* that seek to engage the whole community in co-creating common spaces in ways that allow people to break away from binary antagonistic identifications. Doing-together can also include rituals and cultural practices such as those that take place at memorial sites during commemoration days and Sorry Day Marches. They affirm a we-ness, and mutual recognition of each person's humanity regardless of the differences.

*Purposeful educational initiatives* that explicitly or implicitly challenge the dehumanising narratives. Curricula and teaching approaches can perpetuate wounds and structural harm or they can form part of systemic efforts to redress and to heal. Approaches range from well-adapted textbooks to the use of creative teaching methods and conscious efforts to address bias reflected in educational systems.

As the intention of the research was to understand the healing needs arising from the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery from a holistic perspective, we have been able to pay attention to the differences in the experiences of both trauma and healing entailed by, for instance, individual groups defined by their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and so forth.

Take gender as an example. There has been research that unfolds sufferings endured by the enslaved and the conceptions of race and slavery by the enslaving peoples (e.g. Wood, 2010; Hine, 1989; Alexander, 2004). These research endeavours are pertinent to understanding healing wounds partly because women's central importance in slavery, and the enslaving people's ideas about women in slavery, defined the ways slavery was carried out and have perpetuated its continuation. Equally, there are studies of how women experience the traumas of the legacies of slavery and institutionalised racism (e.g. Rosenthal and Lobel, 2011; McGuire, 2010; Ward et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2005; Settles, 2006). Knowledge of these challenges is particularly important in exploring women's experiences in trans-generationally transmitted traumas. Existing literature can provide a glimpse into not only the gendered nature of slavery, and how a gender perspective might enable a reconceptualisation of trauma and healing in the context of slave trade and slavery, but also the ways that black femininity and gender identities might play into the dynamics of contemporary politics in the processes of more fully addressing racism and the legacies of slavery. It further suggests that a gendered perspective is critical in understanding both the unique needs of women in healing wounds, and their contribution to healing.

Therefore, we have been mindful of gender, and other orientations to healing, and taken into account these dimensions in our analysis of practical workshops or similar initiatives reviewed. However, we have not singled out any of these dimensions or aspects as a unique angle for analysis or discussion unless these are specifically highlighted by the practitioners, or the organisations reviewed. Indeed, as our focus is on collective healing within communities, these dimensions seem to be addressed at the same time, rather than being engaged individually. That is to say an approach to healing will most likely be directed at the gender, sexuality, ethnicity, as well as other social categories simultaneously, despite laying differentiated weight on each of these dimensions. This is connected to our next observation.

We have also noted that it is important that these practices and activities be meaningful in themselves, rather than being merely *for the sake of* an outcome, albeit one that is noble such as healing. Such activities – for example, dialogue events and experiential workshops – are among the ways that communities come together and as such are part of our relational ways of being. Furthermore, the very mention of the word 'healing' can

be off-putting. People may not feel ready; they may not want to be labelled as wounded or traumatised. Thus, it is often better that healing practices emerge from a community's processes, in the day-to-day encounters, and in the collective actions.

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*Albeit in different ways, both groups are experiencing the lasting effects of slavery.*

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In general, those who have been traumatised by dehumanisation and who are suffering from the legacies of a past atrocity tend to recognise the need for healing. In comparison, there is little recognition of this need from those who participated in or have benefited from dehumanising acts, despite the fact that they too are suffering from traumatic effects. Albeit in different ways, both groups are experiencing the lasting effects of slavery. For instance, whilst communities of African descent tend to be disempowered, discriminated against and alienated, the descendants of beneficiaries of the slave trade and slavery may experience guilt and their unrecognised privilege (social, cultural, economic and political) can make them experience hardened indifference or fear. In effect, for those who have participated in dehumanising acts or have been colluding with a dehumanising system are equally deprived of their human dignity (Friere,

1970). Thus, healing applies to both groups, and one of the continued efforts must be directed at cultivating an awareness of the need for healing in both groups, and in particular, in the descendants of the beneficiaries of dehumanisation.

Furthermore, the question of 'Who should heal whom?' can create tensions between the two communities. For example, many healing initiatives are provided by not-for-profit organisations, often from outside marginalised communities. Likewise, the work done by successful philanthropic foundations. These may be seen as sustaining the power imbalance which is already part of the legacies of slavery. For these reasons, we have paid special attention to those projects and movements that are started by and driven from within marginalised communities, but which are open and invite participation from other communities.

Indeed, the Review highlights that healing can sometimes help perpetuate the status quo rather than challenge it. Healing requires political processes that confront oppressive regimes such as the Nuremburg Race Laws and Jim Crow Laws, and that provide new opportunities for the oppressed. That is to say, grassroots healing programmes alone cannot cure the malaise of dehumanisation. For this reason, the Desk Review puts special effort towards integrating the four healing processes, and despite the fact that Process Four, or structural transformation, has few existing examples, we decided to include it in the review because it is integral to healing.



The background of the entire page is a textured, light-colored surface with an embossed floral pattern. The pattern includes a large flower with a pointed bud at the top left, a stem with several leaves, and a smaller flower to the right. In the top right corner, there is a small rectangular object with a grid of lines, possibly a ruler or a small tray. A blue rectangular box with a white border is positioned in the upper right quadrant, containing the Roman numeral 'IV' in white, serif font.

IV

A dark blue horizontal band spans the width of the page, containing the title text in white, serif font.

THE DESK REVIEW  
REPORT



To present the findings of the Desk Review, we have employed the four healing processes as an organising framework. Although already presented, we repeat these here:

- A. Process One: Directed at the Dehumanising Act *per se*;
- B. Process Two: Directed at the Effects of Dehumanisation;
- C. Process Three: Directed at the Dehumanising Relationships;
- D. Process Four: Directed at the Structural Conditions of Dehumanisation.

For each process, the discussion will follow a similar structure:

- 1) An introduction to the specific healing process;
- 2) An outline of some ambiguities identified in the Desk Review;
- 3) A presentation of the case studies most relevant to our inquiry;
- 4) An analysis of the practices within the process.

After an examination of the four processes, we will bring the findings together to make recommendations for a UNESCO Slave Route Project's healing programme handbook. These recommendations will be rooted in community-initiated healing activities rather than national policies or individual practices.

This focus on community-based healing programmes is itself an important conclusion from this Desk Review. It emphasises the relational nature of healing, but without losing sight of the need for systemic transformation.

## A. PROCESS ONE: DIRECTED AT DEHUMANISING ACTS *PER SE*

The first process is directed at the dehumanising acts of trans-Atlantic slavery and those that constitute its legacy. Along this dimension, healing requires: an acknowledgment of the dehumanising nature of the acts; an appreciation of the dignity of all persons; an exploration of what it means and feels like to be wounded; and an understanding of the systemic dynamics that caused and continue to cause the dehumanisation. Such recognitions can serve as atonement for the actors, creating opportunities for them to condemn and rise above such inhumanity.

In undertaking this review, we noted some questions concerning Process One raised in the literature. We do not aim to answer them, but it is important to highlight them.

Scholars and practitioners do not always agree about when and how acknowledgement might count towards healing. For instance, if official apologies are offered, does this require the acceptance by the harmed of such apologies for them to be meaningful for healing? When perpetrators express repentance, does it require the forgiveness of those who have been harmed for such a gesture to be meaningful for healing? Whilst Hannah Arendt (1958/1994) suggests that some evils, such as the Holocaust, are unforgivable, Jacques Derrida (2001) argues that forgiveness only applies to what is unforgivable.

Collectively owning guilt can be problematic. For instance, Arendt (1964) regarded Germany's collective guilt at the end of the Second World War as confused; whereas people who were personally responsible often felt no remorse, those who weren't involved directly and even the generations born after the Second World War suffer from guilt. Arendt argues that collective guilt obscures the direct accountability

of the individuals who should be held as answerable for the atrocity. In opposition to this, solely focusing on individual culpability can ignore the institutional nature and the structural causes of dehumanising acts.

Public atonements are regarded as an important starting point for healing, but can be hollow when they aren't grounded in support from the harmed communities. It is also widely debated how reparations can be structured so as to exemplify an acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoings and as an active making of amends (Gardner Feldman, 2012). What should reparations consist of beyond monetary or materialistic gestures? This question is further complicated when the people directly involved in the dehumanising acts, such as in the cases of the slave trade and colonisation of indigenous peoples, are no longer alive, despite the continued legacies and traumas suffered by later generations who are alive today.

The connections between truth, justice and healing are another area of contention. Are these separate processes or are they integral? When the actors acknowledge their part in an atrocity, does this require truth-telling and some forms of compensation to count as contributing to justice and healing? (see e.g. Asmal et al., 1994; Hamber and Kibble, 1999). There is a perceived tension between justice as punishment and justice as restoration (Shriver, 1995), but these needn't be treated as mutually exclusive. However, in both cases, the need to find immediate ways to reduce violence often means that the root causes of the wounding, such as structural violence, are not addressed and this perpetuates continued wounding. This includes transitional justice which can support the need for acknowledging the systemic wrongdoing and

the need for bringing communities together after being torn apart by violent atrocities and harm on a vast scale.

Systemic transformation is thus in need of being addressed. Atonement often requires structural changes such as revisions of laws to prevent institutionalised dehumanisation and the development of social economics and institutions that are just and not racist. This evokes a tangle of complex questions, including those relating to transitional justice and how systems of justice and governance can be repaired and rebuilt following mass atrocity to rebuild social trust and systems that do not dehumanise.

We shall now draw on some important examples at the national level to illustrate the opportunities for this first kind of healing. When we can, here and throughout this report, we will draw on case studies in the context of trans-Atlantic slavery.<sup>6</sup> We will enrich this with examples of healing initiatives after other instances of mass atrocity, to help illustrate how existing types of healing approaches and practices might contribute to *Process One* of the framework in the case of healing the legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery.

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*Atonement often requires structural changes such as revisions of laws to prevent institutionalised dehumanisation.*

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### 1. Germany Confronting Its Nazi Past

After the Second World War, Germany took measures to prevent the Holocaust from happening again. These initiatives arose from a sense of national moral catastrophe and from the collective trauma of losing millions of people during the war. The public trials of war criminals, the questioning of a younger generation, and the need to regain the trust of the international community contributed to provoking Germany to confront its past, to recognise its actions during the Holocaust and to own up to its moral wrongs; Germany has been praised by many for doing so openly and unflinchingly (Diab, 2013).<sup>7</sup>

Germany's processes have included five key ingredients: (1) national leaders being willing to promote atonement and reconciliation; (2) a collective reckoning with history; (3) institutional relationships between Germany, its



West Germany signs reparations agreement, 10 September 1952. Credit: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Benjamin Ferencz

parties and their neighbours; (4) participation in an international system of shared interests; and (5) foreign policies that focus on political integration into the international family of nations.

After the Second World War, Germany signed various treaties, agreeing to compensate for the destruction caused to other countries, especially to the Jewish people and to Israel. On 10 September 1952, West Germany signed a reparations agreement with Israel agreeing to fund Israel for integrating Holocaust survivors and to pay compensation and restitution to individual Jews. By 2008, Germany had provided a total of €66 billion in general compensation, the largest share of which went to Israel (Diab, 2013).

Reconciliation with other former enemies has distinguished post-Second World War German foreign policy as progressive and reconciliatory. For example, Germany has tried to establish good relationships with Israel and set up a new foundation for relations with France through the Franco-German Youth Office. The 1963 Élysée Treaty ushered in an end to centuries of rivalry with France (Rienzi, 2015). In more recent years, this process of reconciliation and acknowledgement has been illustrated through the high-profile publication of a series of school history coursebooks entitled *Histoire-Geschichte*, the fruit of a collaboration between authors from both France and

<sup>6</sup> For our research, the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery affects the continents in the Americas, Europe, and Africa. However, due to the limited scale of this research, our attention was mainly directed at the Americas, and where possible Africa.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note, in the context of this report, that Germany's relationship with its violent past in Africa has not yet been addressed, let alone atoned for. In 1985, the UN Whitaker Report classified Germany's actions in Southwest Africa between 1904 and 1907/8 as one of the earliest cases of genocide in the twentieth century. This is because Germany's actions involved those aimed to exterminate the Herero and Nama peoples through massacre, starvation and concentration camps. To date, German authorities have neither officially recognised nor apologised for the atrocities which were responsible for the deaths of up to 100,000 Africans (Anabel, 2018; Black 2016).



Germany. This project was publicly supported by both the then French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, and thanks to international coordination the books now have a place on both German and French school curricula, encouraging shared narratives and honesty about past dehumanisation (BBC, 2006).

With the high-profile trial of Adolf Eichmann and others, and with the questioning of a younger generation in the 1960s, Germany became more openly reflective about its recent past. History was taught more honestly in schools and the country was generally more willing to accept collective responsibility for the Holocaust and for war crimes.

With national leaders issuing public apologies, Germany's acknowledgement moved beyond the cognitive, towards accepting that performing such acts constitute a denial of one's own humanity and dignity. The public performance of official apology was regarded as cathartic and as a moral ascension and liberation, and hence as healing. For instance, in 1970, German Chancellor Willy Brandt fell to his knees at a Holocaust memorial in Poland, a dramatic gesture of repentance. Such a public display by a national politician is rare, and Brandt described his act as spontaneous and totally unexpected: 'As I stood on the edge of Germany's historical abyss, feeling the burden of millions of murders, I did what people do when words fail' (Brandt, 1992).

In 1985, in a speech, President Richard von Weizsacker declared that Germans must confront 'the unspeakable truth of the Holocaust' (Kinzer, 1995). This illustrates how remembering for 'Never Again' has been a continuing national effort in Germany, which has since taken different approaches. First, it is a government effort involving heads of state, members of parliament and bureaucrats, who have participated in the annual commemoration, remembering the Nazi murder of millions of Jews and other groups. There is also a public involvement in the remembrance through visits to memorial sites and museums. This is supplemented by the preservation of physical traces of the Nazi era; Germany now has more than 2,000 memorial sites. Another national political approach is hospitality to refugees and migrants: the German national policies that welcome and support refugees have also helped atone for its past acts. For instance, Germany has shown exemplary generosity and empathy towards the plight of the Syrian refugees.

Through these steps, 'Never Again' is more than a slogan for Germany. Based on 'its ability not only to reinvent itself, some have hailed Germany as the role model of truth and reconciliation with an unmatched propensity to come to terms with its ugly past'. At the same time, Germany's collective self-reckoning has been regarded by others as what the 'Germans are doing by themselves and for themselves' (Diab, 2013). Indeed, some claim

that Germany was given no choice, at least by the international community (Neiman, 2019). Nevertheless, these processes are directed at mainly towards reorienting the German society from the trauma of guilt and shame to a renewed moral conscience. The atonement was self-liberating – freeing Germany from the burden of its violent past, despite at the same time, serving as a reminder of 'Never Again'.

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*Reckoning and atoning are only a starting point for reconciliation with the international community.*

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This reckoning and atoning is only a starting point for reconciliation with the international community; it has served 'to put a face to human suffering, to highlight remembrance at the collective and individual levels, [and] is important initially, and for the maintenance of a fundamentally revised structure of interaction thereafter' (Gardner Feldman, 2012, p. 41).

In summary, in the case of Germany, Process One consists predominantly in acknowledging the horror of dehumanising others and thereby dehumanising oneself (Friere, 1970). Such an acknowledgement is first a cognitive act, for example, public apologies, a collective reckoning with history, a self-examination. Second, it is an emotional process, namely an opportunity for Germans to be open to the lived realities of others. The latter is especially pertinent for our inquiry because it shows that Process One must involve the actors internalising the suffering of others, and thereby becoming able to emotionally perceive others as human beings. Furthermore, Germany's public acknowledgment of its history has been accompanied by consistent gestures of reparation and reconciliation, such as Germany's continued commitments to these values in their foreign policies.

## 2. Other Public Apologies and Atonements

Public apologies for the dehumanising act are amongst the most powerful forms of atonement. In this section, we will visit several other such examples and examine how they might contribute to healing.

### a. Australian's public apologies

In the 1770s, the British colonised Australia, and in the ensuing years, the Aboriginal population shrunk from hundreds of thousands to a mere 50,000 in 1930 (Campbell, 1998; Flood, 2006). Between 1910 and 1970, approximately 50,000 children (known as the 'Stolen



Huge crowd on Sydney Harbour Bridge during the Walk for Reconciliation, Corroboree 2000. Credit: Loui Seselja, courtesy of The National Museum of Australia

Generation') from these communities were rounded up and rehoused in white institutions and families, with the explicit intention of racial cleansing. This has been a terrible trauma in Australian history.

At the end of the 1990s, grassroots organisations proposed a national 'Sorry Day', an occasion for solemn commemoration involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians to acknowledge and condemn the mistreatment of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders throughout the country's history. This was seen as a willingness to enter into the suffering endured by Aboriginal people, and those of the Stolen Generation.<sup>8</sup> Spurred by the national Sorry Day movement, in 2008, the Australian Government made a formal apology for the past wrongs inflicted on the indigenous population. This was screened live all over the country. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised, 'without qualification', for the historic acts of dehumanisation enacted through the 'laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss' and 'indignity and degradation' on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia (Hempenstall, 2018).

Rudd also made gestures of atonement – several commitments to rectify and compensate for the Aboriginal people's losses. For instance, he committed the Government to several high-profile policies, aimed at closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in areas such as life expectancy, education, housing and employment. These included enabling every Indigenous four-year-old to attend an early childhood education centre, reducing the gap in literacy and numeracy, and the establishment of a bipartisan policy commission to develop and implement an 'effective housing strategy for remote communities'. He also committed to the expansion of critical services supporting the 'stolen generations' to trace their families and to 'provide dignity to their lives' and to a process of 'constitutional recognition of the first Australians'. Additionally, Rudd and every subsequent Prime Minister are committed to announce, on each anniversary of the apology, whether each item was on track to attainment within the allotted time-span.

In this example, the direct link made between the apology and these practical commitments raised the

<sup>8</sup> This was a clear indication that healing is required by both the communities suffering from the dehumanising act, and the communities who were beneficiaries of such an act.

status of the declaration from mere acknowledgement and regret towards a commitment to atonement and transformation, and to ‘righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future’. The PM particularly highlighted that it is a ‘future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility’. This agenda was well received by public opinion which had been calling for a national apology and a national ‘Sorry Day’ since a public enquiry in 1995–1997 (Bond, 2019). Rudd explicitly posited the apology as the first step towards building a common future for the national community, requesting that it be ‘received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.’<sup>9</sup>

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*The direct link made between the apology and practical commitments raised the status of the declaration above mere acknowledgement and regret.*

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The apology was widely accepted in both Aboriginal communities and their European counterparts, with a sense that the sufferings of the Aboriginal people had finally been officially acknowledged, and that their equal worth and dignity was being more widely recognised. For people of European descent, the feeling of shame and guilt was externalised by the unconditional acceptance of the Government’s responsibilities and the acknowledgement of the horror of its wrongdoing. This permitted more individuals and communities to face the past and accept the need for social justice. The public apology provided an official legitimisation of the cause, and some initiative and funding for policy changes, lending strength to existing community movements and projects.

Rudd’s party was in government for five years, during which time improvements were made in the social conditions of Aboriginal Australians. Since then, groups from both communities continue to work to redress the ill-treatment of Aboriginal communities by the actions of successive Australian governments (Bond, 2019).

### **b. New Zealand’s atonements**

Many Māori indigenous people died as a direct result of the British colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand. In 1840, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed between

Māori and Queen Victoria which pledged to protect the Māori lands from land-buyers. This treaty was quickly flouted, including by the Government itself. The Māori population reached its lowest point at the turn of the twentieth century, when it had fallen to half of what it was prior to contact with the Europeans (Mulholland, 2016).

For many years, Māori *iwi* (nations) had brought land claims to the New Zealand Government. In 1991, negotiations began in earnest to hear and resolve these claims. By 1999, the Government had acted on two major claims, involving around half of New Zealand’s land area. This included returning land on which a major university and the high courts are built (Lean, 1999). To date, there is a complete agreement regarding the South Island and 80% of the North Island, with ongoing negotiations for the remaining 20%. The government has paid agreed compensations.

All settlements included a public apology from the Government to the relevant *iwi*. This was considered by some as a significant part of this reparation process that allowed both parties to move forward (Mulholland, 2016). The public apology on its own, without the settlements and compensations, may not have helped with the healing. This healing has taken place in two ways. First, by returning tens of thousands of acres of land, Māori communities have an increased potential for economic and social transformation. The Māori economies have been strengthened; some lands have been leased back to the Crown, releasing funds for public programmes within the Māori communities. Second, there has been more racial reconciliation between Māori and non-Māori peoples. There has been more inclusive and fairer media representation of Māori language, culture and stories and a visible inclusion of Māori values in a variety of public policies. For example, the New Zealand framework for Schools Evaluation has been underpinned by Māori values.

By publicly acknowledging its dehumanising actions and by showing willingness to atone for and repair the associated harms, the New Zealand government has shifted public perceptions of its history and its current challenges. The Attorney General of the time, Sir Douglas Graham, who led the settlements process, explicitly connected the apology with the dignity of Māori communities and the restoration of the honour of the nation. He suggested that the apology had to be accompanied by reparations to make the acknowledgement and expression of regret meaningful.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> However, Rudd’s claim for his apology to be understood as the *first* step towards healing was ironic, given the widespread support and mobilisation of grassroots movements which had for several decades been organising marches, memorials and initiatives. One such initiative was the famous ‘Sorry Books’, several thousands of which were circulated, largely in public places, in which nearly a million members of the public wrote their own words of atonement for the atrocities committed (Bond, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> This view is supported by, e.g., Brooks (2004, p. x) who suggests that ‘[a]tonement (apology plus reparations) and forgiveness are ... the key ingredients in racial reconciliation.’



### c. Public apologies for trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery

There are increasingly robust examples of public apology involving communities affected by the legacies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery. Between 2007 and 2009, there was a flurry of resolutions passed across eight US States, as well as separately by the US House and US Senate (although no joint bill was passed). These expressed ‘profound regret’ for the dehumanising actions and injustices during the slave trade and included acknowledgement of their sustained perpetuation in current times (Medish and Lucich, 2019). One further State (Delaware) followed suit in 2016 (Hinkley, 2016). However, none of these public statements call for concrete measures to respond to the acknowledged consequences, but only focus on calls for reconciliation, remembrance and recognition (Davis, 2012).

While these resolutions raised the profile of the historic dehumanisation and its largely unresolved fall-out (the issues were covered extensively on national news

media), unlike their German, Australian or New Zealand counterparts, the US Governments made few specific commitments for action, beyond broad aspirations. On the contrary, the resolutions tend to evade the possibility that these apologies might be used as a ground for reparations claims. Nonetheless, the public apologies have provoked the resurgence of pro-reparations groups, such as the Coming to the Table (CTTT) Reparations Working Group and the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N’COBRA), who are calling for reparations to be made at all levels of society (CTTT, 2019).

These claims are not new; indeed there have been calls for reparations since the ex-slave pensions movement in the US following the abolition of slavery. Across the Western world, while slave owners were always to some extent successful in obtaining reparations for the loss of ‘slave property’, calls for financial or in-kind reparations for those they enslaved have been widely disregarded. Thus, whilst European governments paid indemnities to slave owners across the Americas and Caribbean in recompense



Reconciliation Triangle Sculptures, Liverpool, UK (left) and Benin, Africa (right). Courtesy of Broadbent Studio.





Unveiling of the Reconciliation Triangle Statue in Richmond, VA, in 2007. Credit: Karen Elliott Greisdorf

for financial losses, there have been no widespread public reparations made to former slaves nor their descendants. Indeed, in the case of Haiti, the leaders of the slave revolt agreed to pay a huge financial indemnity to France, to secure their independence, with long lasting economic effects on communities (Araujo, 2017).

A significant example of public acknowledgment and apology is that of the 'Reconciliation Triangle' linking Liverpool (UK), Benin (West Africa) and Richmond (US), which opened the possibility of healing beyond conventional national lines. Following the 1998 apology issued by Richmond's mayor, in 1999 Liverpool City Council made a similar apology for their role in the slave trade. In 1999–2000, the President of Benin, made an international 'tour of apology', as well as convening the members of the African Diaspora and slave-trading countries to make a formal apology for Benin's role in selling fellow Africans into slavery, an apology which was then repeated in Richmond. All three locations erected identical bronze reconciliation statues to mark these acts with low-relief designs from youth artists in

Liverpool, Richmond and Benin, reflecting images and thoughts on the slave trade and its effect on the peoples of Africa, the Americas and Europe (Broadbent Studio, 2020). Initiatives such as this, which bring together the narratives and actions of all perpetrators, across national boundaries, may offer us a model which nurtures cooperation, honesty and a 'never again' attitude.

Other African countries have been less forthcoming with public apologies, although in 2006 Ghana made a public apology as part of *Project Joseph*, an initiative that included significant structural changes, to forge stronger links with diaspora communities in North America, including making it easier to visit, own land and start businesses in Ghana. Whilst this initiative has been critiqued as largely economically driven, it has nevertheless created a bridge between Ghana and the African diaspora communities, whose numbers have more than doubled since the start of the initiative (Johnson, 2014). Such initiatives may facilitate new social and economic structures to emerge, that deconstruct the ongoing economic, social and cultural divides between Africa and the 'West'.

Other types of formal apologies in the United States include those made by church groups and a wide range of corporations and organisations. Whilst the latter have tended to be simply statements of acknowledgement and regret for past involvement in the slave trade, the former have tended to be accompanied by ongoing commitments to funding and organising programmes to engage congregations in facing racism and racial inequalities. Churches such as the Episcopal Church and The Southern Baptist Convention have used their authority and influence to provoke change in the ways that their communities relate to the history of slavery and its impacts today. Whilst these apologies and related actions have significant effects within communities, the levels of racial inequality in North America cry out for a national concerted effort, beginning with a joint bill of apology and a clear and comprehensive programme of investment in closing gaps in areas such as employment, health and education.

Equivalent public declarations in most South American nations have not been forthcoming. In 2005, then Brazilian President Lula da Silva made a statement of apology and a request for forgiveness on a state visit to Senegal (DAWN, 2005; BBC, 2005). In 2014, Brazil's national bar association, the Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil (OAB) set up The Commission for Truth About Black Slavery in Brazil as a research and information-sharing process to pave the way to changing public opinion in support of public policies and affirmative action laws. In 2015, the OAB called on the government to make a formal apology for the mass atrocities committed by the Brazilian government throughout the country's involvement in the slave trade (Carrillo, 2015). However, this formal state apology has not been made, and a shift in political leadership has halted progress in this area.



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*The levels of racial inequality in North America cry out for a national concerted effort, beginning with a joint bill of apology and a clear and comprehensive programme of investment.*

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Neither has a formal apology been offered in Colombia, although since 1991 there has been gradual constitutional reform towards anti-discrimination laws and recognition of equal rights (Delaney, 2008). In 2011, a 'landmark anti-discrimination law', originally introduced by the Independent Movement of Absolute Renovation (MIRA) was signed into law by the Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos. The law recognises the rights of vulnerable populations, including Afro-Colombians and women, and threatens those committing acts of discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation or nationality with imprisonment (ESCR-Net, 2018). The National Democratic Institute (NDI) helped create a forum of party and civil society leaders, to discuss how best to work with legislators on Afro-Colombian issues. Indeed, more than 60 leaders of affected groups visited the Senate on the day of the vote to advocate for the passage of the law. These included leaders from the heavily Afro-Colombian department of Chocó and the post-conflict region of Montes de María. Nevertheless, eighty percent of Afro-Colombians live in extreme poverty, politically and physically isolated in communities lacking basic education, security, health and housing infrastructures (NDI, 2019).

### 3. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have been introduced in more than 20 countries in the twentieth century (Hayner, 2000). TRCs can enable the perpetrators of mass atrocities to publicly recognise the nature of their acts and provide opportunities for atonement and reparation. As a government-led process, TRCs have huge potential in acknowledging and documenting what occurred in a full and credible manner, and publicly condemning the dehumanising acts of violent atrocity.

Due to the lack of TRCs in the context of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery, we shall examine the TRC processes in post-apartheid South Africa and post-genocide Rwanda to illustrate how they might be meaningful for healing within Process One of our framework.

#### a. TRC in post-apartheid South Africa

From the 1940s until the repeal of apartheid in 1991, black and other non-white South Africans were subject

to institutionalised racial segregation and oppression, resulting in unemployment, poverty and cultural deprivation. Routinely, they were victimised by the white South African police.

South Africa's TRC was set up in 1995 by the Mandela Government following the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act. This act aimed at acknowledging the atrocities and uncovering the violence of apartheid. Because social divisions were so deep, reconciliation was an important objective of the TRC. The former Minister of Justice asserted that TRC is 'a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation' (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2020).

The Commission consisted of three committees: (1) Human Rights Violations Committee, established in 1995, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu; (2) Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee; and (3) Amnesty Committee. The Commission initially prepared and organised public hearings which were carried out as 'investigative mechanisms with the primary aim of publishing an authoritative and factual report on human rights violations committed in a country' (Hamber, 2002). The first public hearing was held in April 1996 and lasted for four days with the aim of hearing the experiences of victims of gross violations, from the people themselves, and to provide a forum for many voices that had previously been silenced (TRC, 1998). This was established as a model (of three days) for future TRC hearings.

The public hearings were attended by the victims and perpetrators, by carefully selected statement-takers responsible for recording the testimonies, and by witnesses to ensure that the accounts would reflect all sides of the political conflict. The hearings were intended to seek out the truth of 'What had happened?' and 'How did it happen?' They were also meaningful in 'restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are the victims' (ibid., p. 6). Through truth-telling, those who admitted their part in the violence and other crimes during apartheid were given the opportunity to seek amnesty for their acts.

In addition to public hearings to listen to victims' testimonies, the Commission also held other public hearings to 'explore the motives and perspectives of the different role players, further inquiring into 'the roles of the state, the liberation movements, the political parties and various different sectors of society' (ibid., p. 8). In these ways, the hearings were the public face of the Commission and were reported widely in the media and witnessed by national and international representatives, shifting the perceptions of millions of people about the past.



A Gacaca court in session in Ruhango, Rwanda. Credit: Samuel Gasana, courtesy of The World from PRX

During the 18 months of the TRC hearings, over 20,000 people provided statements and testified before the Commission. Many investigators have found that acknowledging the moral wrong of the violent oppression through public truth-telling was cathartic. However, it is widely recognised that healing also requires justice and reparation, which South Africa was not able to provide (Hamber et al., 2000). Based on this experience, it has been claimed that truth-justice-reparation constitutes a continuum, in that truth-telling supports the pursuit of justice, and reparation is integral to trust in a just system and the rule of law.

For many South African people who were invested in the original intentions of the TRC, the process was viewed ultimately as a let-down. It was perceived as a failure on several fronts. It inadequately acknowledged the inherent racist and dehumanising nature of the apartheid system. It too readily provided amnesty to perpetrators of violent acts. Furthermore, it was painstakingly slow in offering reparations, and when

finally offered, this was only to a very small minority of victims (Hamber, 1998). Thus, post-apartheid South Africa continues to be marked by structural injustice, such as poverty and unemployment among non-white South Africans.

For our inquiry, this case study suggests that for healing to occur, the actors must integrate the public acknowledgment of dehumanising acts with actively addressing the root causes of violence and injustice.

#### b. TRC in post-Tutsi genocide Rwanda

The most plausible explanation for the Rwandan genocide was the German and the Belgian divide-and-rule style of colonisation under which the Tutsis were given explicit political, educational and economic privileges over the Hutus. This created two classes of people, namely the Tutsi bourgeoisie and the Hutu working class, compounded by years of lack of political will to address systemic injustice and continued development failures.

The first genocide took place in 1959 and the early 1960s, resulting in the killing of 10,000 Tutsis, while another 120,000 fled to neighbouring countries as refugees. After Rwandan independence in 1961, the positions of privilege were now reversed: Tutsis were marginalised and excluded from key positions (Destexhe, 1995).

The second major genocide happened in 1994. On 6 April, rebels shot down a plane carrying the Presidents of Rwanda (Hutu) and Burundi, killing both, as well

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*For healing to occur, the actors must integrate the public acknowledgment of dehumanising acts with actively addressing the root causes of violence and injustice.*

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as members of the presidential staff. The Rwandan Government blamed the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front for the attack. In retaliation, Hutu extremists (the Interahamwe) started a systematically planned and purposefully executed genocide of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. In just over 100 days, more than 800,000 Rwandans were killed (Tutu, 1994; Dallaire, 2003; Des Forges, 1999), leaving the country wounded to the core; all survivors were traumatised, but in very different ways.

In 1999, the Government established the Rwanda National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) to promote unity and reconciliation amongst the conflicted groups. Amongst NURC's initiatives was the Gacaca Court, a traditional TRC practice seeking communal justice, involving judges elected by the local community to preside over court proceedings. 'Gacaca' means grass in Kinyarwanda, and as the name suggests, courts were held within public communal spaces (Clark, 2010). The traditional practice aims to avoid a punitive approach to wrongdoing; instead, it seeks consensus on how an offender might continue to be integrated in the community and on how to provide them with the opportunity to put right their wrong act, through services, reparation and restoration.

The Rwandan Government resuscitated the concept of Gacaca in response to the slowness and high cost of the UN International Criminal Tribunal in prosecuting high-ranking government and army officials accused of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity (*ibid.*). In 2003, the Gacaca courts brought to trial some of the 120,000 people in prison.<sup>11</sup> According to NURC, in addition to speeding up the legal processes, the main aims of Gacaca courts were to enable truth-telling and public confessions, and to encourage genocidaires to apologise and to offer reparations. In these ways, the Gacaca processes would facilitate the reintegration of perpetrators into their local communities.

The Gacaca courts resemble the South African TRC in that both have at their core community tribunals for sharing the truth(s) about what happened and that both involve survivors, perpetrators and witnesses. However, unlike the South African TRC, the Rwandan Gacaca courts aimed to settle the losses in ways agreeable to both parties, and to achieve some form of justice. Of course, there are many controversies surrounding both the process of the courts and the retributions it sought. For instance, the Gacaca process might give the impression that the genocide consisted of individual actions, and that personal atonement could suffice for something much graver and more systemic.

<sup>11</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, there were between 600,000 and 761,000 people accused of committing crimes during the genocide. Whilst the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) were only able to prosecute eight cases and one acquittal in seven years of work, Rwandan national courts dealt with about 6,000 cases.

<sup>12</sup> This was fairly typical of Catholic colleges at the time. For a history of Catholic colleges and slavery in the United States, see Wilder (2016) especially pp. 232–234 and 237–242.

#### 4. Atoning for Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery

Amongst the cases of atoning for slavery, perhaps Georgetown University's example is a good illustration of what an engaged healing process might look like.

Founded in 1789, Georgetown University, a Jesuit school in Washington DC, has historically had deep connections to plantations in areas near Washington. Prohibited by the Vatican from charging tuition for much of its early history, it initially relied on the proceeds from a number of plantations owned by Jesuits in the Maryland area.<sup>12</sup> The university began charging tuition in 1832, at a time when abolitionist forces were growing in border states and many plantations were becoming financially unviable. In 1838, the president of Georgetown, Thomas Mulledy (a Jesuit priest), and the superior of the Maryland Jesuits, William McSherry, sold 272 slaves into the deep South to pay off debts accumulated from a significant expansion of the university in the previous decade (Quallen, 2015c).

In August 2015, partly prompted by a growing awareness of this history through the work of the university historian and campus publications (see e.g. Quallen, 2014; Curran, 2010; Syeed, 2004), President John DeGioia established a 16-person Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation to examine the history of the university, make recommendations, and host events to promote dialogue about the relevant topics. This action on behalf of the leadership significantly elevated the status of the issue, sparking further action in the community, such as the founding of the Georgetown Memory Project by a Georgetown alumnus. This project seeks to identify the descendants of the 272 slaves sold in 1838, and to date has been able to identify over 8,500 of them, in large part thanks to the detailed records kept by the nineteenth-century Jesuits (Swarns, 2016; The Georgetown Memory Project, 2020).

In June 2016, the Working Group submitted its report to the university. Much of its research into the history confirmed existing knowledge, such as that the 272 sale broke up families in direct violation of orders from the Vatican. In many other places, it cited a need for further research on issues such as the identities of the descendants of the 272 or the possibility that human remains may be buried on more sites on campus than previously thought (Collins et al., 2016; see also Quallen, 2015a, 2015b).

In its report, the Working Group recommended a public apology, a memorial, a permanent renaming of

Mulledy and McSherry Halls, and offering scholarships and preferential admissions treatment to descendants of the 272 slaves sold in 1838. It further proposed creating an Institute for the Study of Slavery and Its Legacies; incorporating an official walking tour of significant black sites into freshman programming; ensuring upkeep of Holy Rood Cemetery, an off-campus location maintained by the university where many slaves were buried; and creating a Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of its recommendations (Collins et al., 2016, pp. 35–41).

The report particularly emphasised the need to include descendants in all future conversations (their lack of representation in the Working Group had already been a point of contention) (Scoville, 2016). The Working Group also took up the question of reparations:

While we acknowledge that the moral debt of slaveholding and the sale of the enslaved people can never be repaid, ... we are convinced that reparative justice requires a meaningful financial commitment from the University. (Collins et al., 2016, p. 59)

The university responded almost immediately to the Working Group's report with a number of concrete steps: Mulledy and McSherry Halls were given new names, descendants of the 272 slaves were granted preferential treatment in admissions decisions on a par with legacy students (although no commitment to providing scholarships was made), and President DeGioia promised an official apology, a public memorial, and a new institute for the study of racial justice (Swarns, 2016). The official apology, offered from representatives of the Jesuit order,

activists at Georgetown have engaged in active organising efforts; descendants identified so far have formed a representative organisation to engage the university and have sought to establish an endowment fund to offer scholarships (GU272 Descendants Association, 2016; see also Scoville, 2016); students have tried to raise funds to restore the tombstones of the 272 around the country; and one student offered to design and donate a memorial to the university (The Hoya, 2017; Miller, 2018).

On 12 April 2019, the undergraduate student body voted overwhelmingly to charge all students an annual fee of \$27.20 in order to fund reparations to the descendants of the 272 (Jonnalagadda, 2019). Although it is unclear how this fund was to be distributed, some proposals included using it for community programmes in Maringouin, Louisiana, where 900 of the town's 1,000 residents are descendants (The Hoya, 2017).

In October 2019, President DeGioia updated the university community on progress made over time. At the invitation of Descendant leaders, Georgetown have joined the Jesuits and Descendant leaders in a process of dialogue, guided by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's *Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation* framework. This dialogue is anchored in practices of trust-building, truth-telling, racial healing and transformation. Georgetown is committed to prioritising this ongoing dialogue process as other ideas and initiatives are brought forward.

The University has also engaged with a variety of stakeholders, including its Board of Directors, Descendants, alumni, faculty, student leaders and staff, to discuss the ideas outlined in the student referendum, and has committed to working with the Georgetown community to create an initiative that supports community-based projects with Descendant communities. This work will be grounded in the university's academic mission of education, research, and service; will provide opportunities for student leadership; and will be guided by extensive consultation and engagement with Descendants. The university pledged to ensure that the initiative has resources commensurate with, or exceeding, the amount that would have been raised annually through the proposed student fee, with opportunities for every member of the community to contribute. The university will establish an advisory group to develop a plan for launching this initiative and soliciting ideas for projects, and advisory groups will continue the work on Academic and Research Initiatives and Public History efforts.

Georgetown's response can on the whole be characterised by a willingness to engage directly and frankly with the institution's role in slave trade and its legacies, and to make meaningful public commitments in relation to this acknowledgement. However, as the Working

## *The apologies of politicians and public figures can enable others to acknowledge acts of dehumanisation, both past and present.*

came in April 2017, during a formal liturgy that included many of the descendants (Urtz and Steinberg, 2017).

After its initial response, the university leadership pursued a course of action that tended to emphasise dialogue over further immediate actions, although it took some additional steps in the interim period, such as creating a Department of African American Studies and making plans to hire a full-time archivist to curate archival materials related to slavery (Hartuv, 2019).<sup>13</sup>

The extent of community action and involvement in this time, however, has grown. Descendants, students, and

13 The website of the Working Group for Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation keeps an up-to-date list of the university's actions to date, and accessible at <http://slavery.georgetown.edu/>.



Group's report, the descendants' demands, and student advocacy have underscored, the real test comes when the institution is challenged to move beyond symbolic action and to make meaningful (financial) reparations. Without structural changes to make such commitments possible, atoning for its past wrongdoing might seem insufficient.

## DISCUSSION

The selected cases show that the apologies of politicians and public figures can enable others to acknowledge acts of dehumanisation, both past and present. For example, there have been public acknowledgements from some corporations, such as Lehman Brothers, and from former slave-trading families. However, much of 'white America' seems to be paralysed psychologically in its capacity to confront this history in an open and honest way (Corcoran, 2010). This psychological burden is a major impediment to any serious attempt to 'reckon' with the past, as Germany has done, and it is a major blockage to political collaboration between the liberal and conservative politicians, and the Northern and Southern leaders in other sectors of the country (ibid.).

Even when agents and institutions have the moral courage to confront the past, it is questionable to what extent they have been willing to atone publicly for their part in the dehumanisation. The public apology places past atrocities directly in an open conversation. It acknowledges the

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*Much of 'white America' seems to be paralysed psychologically in its capacity to confront this history in an open and honest way.*

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## B. PROCESS TWO: DIRECTED AT THE EFFECTS OF DEHUMANISATION

Dehumanisation is a serious form of harm. Like ill-being, the opposite of well-being, this harm affects multiple dimensions of a person's life. These may include, for example, being denied the opportunity to engage in valuable activities such as learning and work; feelings of anxiety, fear, anger and sadness; and being discriminated against and marginalised. Perhaps especially important, dehumanisation also affects one's relationship to oneself, that is, damage to one's sense of oneself, of one's dignity and wholeness.

Healing consists, in part, in liberating people from these harmful effects which can accumulate and be transmitted from one generation to another. This requires treating

acts of wounding and legitimises this acknowledgement. However, public apologies can be politically deceptive by giving the appearance of a commitment to reconciliation but without committing to any concrete action to change the plight of those affected (Yamamoto et al., 2007). This critique emphasises the need for public apologies to go hand in hand with reparations and social actions. As illustrated in the cases of Germany, New Zealand and others, when public apologies are combined with reparations, this can inspire national and grassroots awareness and action.

Reparations signal an obligation to be responsible for ending wounding and express a commitment to addressing the root causes of dehumanisation. There are other forms of reparation apart from financial compensation such as returning land and better access to education and health. In other words, reparations go beyond the merely symbolic apology and constitute a practical step towards structural reform. Indeed, public apologies highlight the need for systemic transformation. For, otherwise, structural violence will continue to perpetuate wounding. Few have recognised the systemic economic root of trans-Atlantic slavery, in which industrial processes treat people as commodities.

Process One needn't consist only in public acknowledgments, apologies and reparations. There are also processes and activities whereby people can understand better, in the micro-interactions of their daily lives, how, when and why they dehumanise another person or treat them as inferior and unimportant. Likewise, group reflection can help us appreciate better and share what it is like to be dehumanised or treated as inferior or unimportant, how this makes us feel and what our typical reactions are. Since we are all on both the giving and receiving sides of such actions, such exercises are particularly meaningful in enabling us to understand the lived realities of other people.

the wounds themselves rather than just the symptoms. Healing starts with diminishing suffering, easing grief and assuaging tormenting emotions. It may also involve transcending a broken sense of oneself towards wholeness and awareness of one's dignity. Importantly, healing includes transforming psychological and cultural habits, such as self-imposed oppression (Friere, 1970) and learned helplessness (DeGruy, 2017), which may perpetuate wounding.

In the Desk Review, we came across several contentions and inconsistent understandings relating to healing trauma/wounding in the context of Process Two. These include the following:

Remembrance and commemoration are considered important to healing. On the one hand, such events can create shared collective spaces that de-silence pain (Araujo, 2010), and help people recognise that dehumanisation can be variously experienced, a diversity that puts a human face on often unspeakable sufferings. Remembering is the prelude to mourning (Casey, 2009). Such events also stress the imperative for justice and reinforce collective responsibility. However, there are risks involved in remembering. For example, these events may be re-traumatising for participants (Brounéus, 2008). Without special efforts, commemorations can become occasions for the political elites (Cameron, 2003). Thus, remembering needs to be carried out in safe spaces whereby people can feel respected rather than further robbed of their dignity (Edkins, 2003).

Breaking silence about past dehumanising acts is proven to be a key to healing. Some scholars have nonetheless regarded this as a 'double-edged sword' (Gourd, 2011). For instance, they argue that it can easily be made sense of in over-simplistic ways. Effects of harm are always complex, multi-layered, and thus remembering such experiences must be multi-vocal. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the causes of historic wounding, the symptoms of intergenerational trauma, and the current experiences of ongoing structural violence; they tend to be intermingled in an indiscernible whole (Urrieta, 2019). Furthermore, it is not always clear in terms of the kind of emphasis that should be placed more on the legacy of dehumanisation or on the resilience, contributions and progress made by the wounded (Rice, 2004). In a paper advocating de-silencing global history, Deveau (2006) cautions that we 'need to maintain a constant vigilance if we are to prevent history from turning into a court where resentment is perpetuated' (p. 248).

Socio-cultural and psychological pathologies amongst African Americans have been recognised as the result of historical trauma and unresolved grief. The social pathology includes high rates of suicide, domestic violence and other social problems. The psychological pathology includes anxiety, depression, anger and other mental health problems (DeGruy, 2017). These symptoms have been attributed to inter-generationally transmitted traumas which are defined differently, depending on the emphasis, such as the biological, psychological, social and cultural (Beltrán and Begun, 2014). However, identifying persons as traumatised is another area of contention. For some sufferers, a diagnostic term such as PTSD means an acknowledgement of their perplexing symptoms and an opening for healing. For example, Joy DeGruy coined the term 'post traumatic slave syndrome' (PTSS) which characterises and explains the lived realities of many African Americans (DeGruy, 2017). However, for others, such a term might mean a form of labelling which reduces the socio-economic and political complexities of

dehumanisation to a disease category that individualises it (Jones, 2017).

The memory of past atrocities and ongoing marginalisation connect to a group's collective identity. For some, the suffering resulting from slavery has become part of the identity of African Americans. Acts of remembering serve not only to recognise the harms of slavery, but also to reinforce this identity. In regions where the enslaved Africans form only a minority of the population, remembering and commemoration are significant to such identity (Nora, 1989). However, identity as a lens to discuss historical traumas and experiences of harms may have hidden traps (Urrieta, 2019). Because identity tends to be based on exclusions, it can evoke antagonisms, especially in the way we recount human suffering (Tuck and Yang, 2014). Likewise, it can reify victimisation and pathologise communities' ways of being. In a similar vein, binary identities place people in opposite camps, namely victims require healing, and perpetrators require atoning (Kirmayer et al., 2014). Moving away from a binary view can allow those who committed dehumanising acts (and their descendants) to better recognise their need for healing, and accept that they too can be living the harmful effects of wounding (even though the acts were committed by themselves or by their ancestors) (Shriver, 2005).<sup>15</sup> Acknowledging such trauma can help free healing processes from moral judgments and confirm that healing is a human affair (Mohamed, 2015). Additionally, there are people who simply do not fall into one specific category, for example the survivors, bystanders and witnesses, who may also need some healing.

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### *Breaking silence about past dehumanising acts is proven to be a key to healing.*

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Healing directed at the harmful effects of dehumanisation does not happen by merely listing all the horrors, lest we forget. Healing requires that we explore *with* one another human imperfections, especially those that occur within a dehumanising structure. For example, some white southerners in the US have come to see their history from new perspectives because African Americans recognised the humanity of those who symbolise their oppression (Corcoran, 2010, pp. 64–5).

The Desk Review identified a wealth of healing practices directed at the effects of dehumanisation, both outside and within the Americas and the Caribbean. Although there is a rich overlap in these initiatives, for the sake of simplicity, we will discuss these within the following four categories:

<sup>15</sup> On the significance of recognising the 'mental sickness' of African Americans' oppressors, see Hicks (2015).



*Remembering and Commemorating.* These are approaches that prioritise the need for public remembering, including commemoration events, monuments, public spaces for remembrance, for example memorial sites, burial sites and museums, and other memory forms, such as history textbooks and Black History week. Other examples might include film, literature and theatre.

*Making Sense of Trauma.* This approach aims to help people make sense of their trauma and develop or renew a self-awareness that is not defined by trauma. They aim to help the wounded recognise and understand their suffering, separate themselves from the effect of the wound and to find ways to transcend it.

*Reconnecting to Dignity.* The third are psycho-social processes that help the wounded reconnect to their dignity. Such practices seek to shift and therefore transform cultural practices within families, communities and institutions, such as churches, that perpetuate the effects of trauma.

*Restoring Human Spirit and Wholeness.* The last category refers to those practices directed to restoring a sense of wholeness in the wounded. These methodologies are rooted in renewed self-identification as whole persons, and the interconnection of all beings. Some draw on indigenous, traditional and religious worldviews; some take a secular spiritual approach; others employ creative and artistic methods.

As already mentioned, in many healing practices these four elements are inextricably entangled. To illustrate them, we use examples of well-researched programmes to show how these practices support each of the aspects of healing.

## 1. Remembering and Commemorating

Remembering the past atrocities is a starting point for acknowledging and understanding the effects of dehumanisation. As the slave trade and slavery were largely absent from public historical narratives across the Atlantic World until recent decades (Rice and Kardux, 2012), this silence tended to deny or negate the experiences of trauma endured by generations of enslaved African Americans and their descendants. In the last

30 years, however, in Europe, the Americas and Africa, there has been a growing number of monuments, memorials, museums and other landmarks to remember the trans-Atlantic slave trade.<sup>16</sup> These sites not only help people and communities to recall past atrocities, but sometimes, they also serve as a reminder of the contributions of African Americans' resilience, and their gifts towards the development of Europe and the Americas. The latter symbolises the possibility to transcend suffering.

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*Remembering the past atrocities is a starting point for acknowledging and understanding the effects of dehumanisation.*

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Remembering the past is meaningful for recognising the effects of trauma and dehumanisation. For instance, public events, museums, 'restored' plantations, memorials, films, theatre and artistic installations provide opportunities and communal spaces for remembering past traumas and acknowledging their continuing harmful effects. These acts of remembering serve to raise public awareness of trauma endured by the wounded. There is a sense that unless the lives lost and the suffering are properly honoured, the wounds of history cannot be healed. Similarly, burial sites, memorials and other public spaces fix memories to a specific location. This placement can be powerful.

There are many examples of such initiatives, especially in North America. However, few have become widely visible on a national or international level, a notable exception being the National Museum of African American History and Culture that is part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC.

### a. The National Museum of African American History and Culture

The NMAAHC is an American national museum devoted exclusively to documenting and commemorating the lives, histories and cultures of African Americans. It endeavours to acknowledge the horrors of the slave trade and of slavery and to celebrate African American culture and contributions to the United States. The NMAAHC was opened to the public in 2016. Through exhibitions, research programmes and other initiatives, it seeks to

<sup>16</sup> The intention to break the silence about the histories of Transatlantic Slave Trade and Slavery was highly contested. At the centre of the debates are issues such as shame, temporal focus (between whether to place emphasis on the past or the progression into the present), and the horrors of slavery as opposed to African Americans' resilience and contributions to society. Equally, the arguments and presentations in terms of the ways that the past should be remembered and commemorated also differ across the Atlantic World. For instance, in the Anglophone Caribbean, the emphasis is on resistance and not on slavery, whereas in the Francophone Caribbean and in France, the focus is on the benevolence of the French abolitionists, and in Europe as a whole, on the abolition processes.

memorialise the histories of people of African descent in America: the sufferings of being enslaved; the capacity for resistance and resilience; the cultures that enriched America; the contribution to the civil war and the world wars; the campaigns for human liberation and the challenges to contemporary American politics.

By presenting to the public how present dehumanisation is grounded in the past, the NMAAHC challenges the status quo and encourages open discussions about race and social justice. This recognition of traumas and harms endured by generations of African Americans is a powerful way to emplace the effects and legacies of dehumanisation within their historical contexts and their contemporary variations. Within such an environment, honest discussions about race and social justice are encouraged. Indeed, it also features exhibitions such as *A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond* and *Power of Place*, where visitors can see how resilience, optimism and spirituality are reflected in African American history and culture.

#### b. Other sites of public historical interest in the United States

Another key recent example is the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, located near the site of a former slave market in Montgomery. Inspired by similar high-profile

memorials internationally, such as the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, the memorial honours the memory of the more than 4,000 victims of lynchings at the hands of white supremacists between 1850 and 1877. Funded by charitable foundations, the site opened in May 2018, and consists of 805 hanging steel rectangles, the size and shape of coffins. Each rectangle represents a county where a documented ‘racial terror lynching’ took place and is inscribed with the names of every victim (Song, 2016; Robertson, 2018). The team behind the National Memorial has played a significant role in bringing to light the silenced history around these acts of dehumanisation which were made possible following the brutal acts and discourses of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but it also has significant forward-looking aspects. For example, the accompanying Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, makes explicit the links between the historic dehumanisation and ongoing racism in the United States. Furthermore, each of the steel rectangles matches another, laid outside the memorial, and counties are being encouraged to claim theirs, as the basis for new localised memorials (EJI, 2020). Thus by design, the memorial is extending the conversation beyond its own walls, and has already prompted one local newspaper to review and formally express shame and apology for its historic racist coverage of lynching (Lyman, 2018; Montgomery Advertiser Editorial Board, 2018).



Memorial Corridor at The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, AL. Credit: Soniakapadia CC BY-SA 4.0. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Memorial\\_Corridor\\_at\\_The\\_National\\_Memorial\\_for\\_Peace\\_and\\_Justice.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Memorial_Corridor_at_The_National_Memorial_for_Peace_and_Justice.jpg)





*Nkyinkim* by Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, at The National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Credit: AP Photos, Brynn Anderson

The approach of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice is reminiscent of another smaller initiative in North America, Stopping Stones, which was inspired by ‘*Stolpersteine*’ (‘stumbling blocks’) the largest decentralised memorial in Germany, which has inspired similar memorials across Europe. *Stolpersteine*s are brass plates inscribed with the name and dates of victims of Nazi persecution, which are set into concrete blocks in the street where they lived (Nowak, 2016; DW, 2019). Likewise, Stopping Stones are small brass markers with the names of enslaved Africans, placed in the sidewalk where they last lived. Each stone is linked to an online database, which encourages further action towards enquiry, understanding, remembering and racial healing (Stopping Stones, 2020).

Many other historically significant sites, including several of the large plantations in North America, have been repurposed and opened to visitors as education sites, for raising public awareness of the experiences of enslaved persons. Examples include burial sites for enslaved Africans, Thomas Jefferson’s plantation at Monticello and the Whitney Plantation, Louisiana. At various historic sites, among them Mount Vernon and Monticello, recent exhibits humanise and focus on the slaves who made the institutions possible.

The African Burial Ground in New York, dating from the 1630s to 1795, is the oldest and largest known

excavated burial ground in North America for both free and enslaved African Americans. In 1993, it was designated as a National Historic Landmark. The site now incorporates an external memorial, an interpretive centre and a research library to commemorate the contributions of enslaved Africans in New York and to honour their memory (National Park Service, 2019).

Monticello has public education exhibitions and tours, as well as serving as a hub hosting events for public engagement and discussion. For example, an international summit entitled *Memory, Mourning and Mobilization: Legacies of Slavery and Freedom in America* was held at Monticello in 2016, bringing together thousands of individuals, including the descendants of enslaved families. The summit explored the history, how to move forward and how to transcend the factors that continue to dehumanise African Americans (Monticello, 2016).

At the Whitney Plantation, visitors can take a walking tour to explore slavery in Louisiana, by visiting slave dwellings and a freeman church (Whitney Plantation, 2020). A similar smaller-scale initiative is the *Slave Dwelling Project* which oversees the restoration of slave dwellings across North America, for use in public education about the inhumane conditions imposed upon slaves (The Slave Dwelling Project, 2020). Such exhibitions, situated in the historical sites of slavery, can offer powerful experiences

of mourning and reflection. They bring home the reality of the past.

These sites are significant in making the past more visible to the communities, thus providing opportunities for all to be reminded and to recognise the effects of historical atrocities.

### c. Remembering and healing through stories, arts, films, theatre, and other creative outlets

There are many small-scale initiatives that engage with people and communities on an emotional level through stories, arts, films, and drama as approaches to healing. These tend to be grassroots initiatives that spring up in response to a need for healing through remembering within a community.

In the North American context, oral history projects, such as The Getting Word Project, from the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Documenting the American South from the University of Carolina, and The Federal Writers' Project from the Work Projects Administration, support recounting of the historical narratives, partly by engaging descendants from both sides to remember the legacies of slavery and to explore how to address its harms together (Anderson, 2017; Allen, 2014; Library of Congress, 2019). Such initiatives arose out of the need for historical narratives given the long-standing silencing of the African American experience and the lack of historical documentation.

These initiatives can also promote healing. When individuals and communities explore the history of their ancestors, this opens up opportunities for national reflection. The humanity of these stories can provoke a sense of connection and empathy across racial divides. For instance, the stories gathered through The Getting Word Project brought together descendants of Jefferson and of his slaves. By gathering oral histories, new historical narratives have come to the fore, such as Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings, an enslaved woman on his plantation. The team responsible for gathering the oral history narratives emphasise the importance of humility and sensitivity in asking individuals to share their families' stories. Many of the stories are now accessible to the public, in the form of exhibitions at Monticello and on the Monticello website. Through such means, the words of individuals can touch others across the globe, sparking empathy and awareness.

Like public historical narratives, documentary films play an important role in supporting processes of remembering. Two significant examples in North America are: *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North* (Browne et al, 2008), which recounts history through the lens of descendants of the largest slave-trading family in the United States; and *The Healing Passage: Voices from the Water* (Sharp, 2004), in which cultural artists, historians and healers look at links between present-day behaviours in the light of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the role of the arts and ritual in healing. When such films are presented on popular news networks and in public settings, such as



*The Children of Whitney*, clay statue by Woodrow Nash, at the Whitney Plantation, LA. Credit: The Whitney Plantation <https://www.whitneyplantation.org/photo-gallery/>



schools and churches, their message reaches audiences of all ethnicities, provoking audiences to dialogue.

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## *Popular film, theatre, television and novels use fictionalised narratives to depict the dehumanising experiences of the past.*

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Popular film, theatre, television and novels also use fictionalised narratives to depict the dehumanising experiences of the past. For example, in the African American community in Brooklyn, St Paul's Community Baptist Church annually hosts *The MAAFA Suite: A Healing Journey*, a theatrical commemoration of the 'Maafa'. *The MAAFA Suite* tells the story of Africans confronted with the arrival of white enslavers, their voyage to America and the complex circumstances under which they were oppressed. The wealth of popular media bringing the historic plight of enslaved persons and their enslavers into the public eye are too numerous to present here. We might, however, mention the Oscar Nominated film *Harriet* (Focus Features, 2019), as a significant contemporary example, which tells the history of Harriet Tubman, an African American abolitionist, born into slavery and later responsible for the escape of some 70 slaves via the Underground Railroad. The medium of arts-based performance can be deeply moving. It allows participants to engage with the horrors of dehumanisation, but also draw strength from narratives of resilience.

Perhaps even more significant in terms of healing the contemporary legacies of the historic atrocity, are examples of popular media that visibilise the ongoing dehumanisation which is inherent in contemporary race relations in all affected countries across three continents. There have been several high-profile television initiatives and groups with this mission, including the Television Race Initiative (TRI) in California, funded by the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. TRI was responsible for the national airing in the United States of a series of high-profile provocative programs dealing with race between 1998 and 2000. TRI's explicit aim was to 'harness the inevitable post-broadcast "buzz" into sustained dialogue and, ultimately, citizen engagement' (Television Race Initiative, 1999). They formed partnerships with national non-profits, local and national media, public TV stations, community groups, interfaith networks, businesses and educational institutions and accompanied the release of the series with viewer dialogue groups. By virtue of the broad outreach that such media initiatives can have, they may play a key role in fostering understanding and acknowledgement of the ongoing racism and its implications for individuals and communities. There

are several other groups working to ensure non-racist media coverage of communities of colour in the United States, including the DuPage Media and Community Network and the Multi-Cultural Advisory Committee on the Media (both based in Illinois) and the News Watch Project in California (Anderson et al., 1999). Similar groups are seemingly not yet visible in South America, Africa or the Caribbean.

There are, however, several examples of inspiring practice emerging in Africa, such as the 'Antislavery Knowledge Network' as part of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project, based in the University of Liverpool, UK. A key project partner, The University of Ghana, Legon, has hosted several high-profile workshops and exhibitions. These include an exhibition in 2019, entitled 'Historical and Modern Slavery in Ghana: Evidences from the Volta and Northern Regions'. The exhibition brought together undergraduate students, heritage sector professionals and practitioners, and postgraduates and staff from across the university, and offered interactive opportunities for audiences to make connections between the historic slave trade and modern-day slavery in Ghana (UKRI, 2020). Other examples include Anyidoho's (2017) innovative arts-based lecture: 'Re-Memory: An African Poet and The Burden of History', which brought together the voices of African poets and musicians to explore the role of the arts in remembering, retelling and healing the historical wounds of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Another project partner, the youth-focussed community arts centre Yole!Africa, based in the Democratic Republic of Congo, developed a youth photography programme and accompanying artistic film showcasing the impact of the project. In partnership with local communities in Goma, Congo, Yole!Africa worked with the Alice Seeley Harris Archive to inspire young photographers and to 'reactivate historical memory' of local slave and abolitionist history (UKRI, 2020; Yole!Africa, 2020). Whilst these projects remain small-scale, they may give an indication of the kinds of roles that universities and targeted funding may play in supporting community-focussed opportunities for de-silencing and commemorating past atrocities and building healing narratives, particularly arts-based approaches, in economically deprived areas such as sub-Saharan Africa.

It is significant that initiatives often use arts-based approaches to involve communities in processes of remembering. Such practices engage people on an emotional level, inviting empathy, which is needed as the background for rebuilding relationships, as we will explore in the discussion of Process 3.

## 2. Making Sense of Trauma

An important part of healing is making sense of the trauma one has experienced, which involves both



MAAFA Suite 2012. Credit: SPCBCGriots. CC by 2.0. <https://flic.kr/p/fKAmcC>

recognising that one has been traumatised and separating one's sense of self from that trauma. This is a fundamental aspect of healing (Staub et al., 2005). Trauma can isolate and shame people. It also can lead one to feel less human and lose touch with one's sense of oneself. Making sense of trauma enables a person to see that the psychological, behavioural, somatic, and spiritual effects of violence are typical consequences of dehumanisation.

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### *Trauma can isolate and shame.*

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Acknowledging one's woundedness is a first step. However, there is a lack of awareness amongst the descendants of both the enslaved and enslavers of the traumatic effects of history. In recent years, there have been increasing calls to recognise this. Concerning the African American population, this call has come primarily in the form of research and therapeutic work, inspired by Joy DeGruy's identification of Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) which highlights common beliefs and actions that can be linked directly to historic experiences of dehumanisation, transmitted inter-generationally (DeGruy, 2005). There has also been an increased awareness of 'white guilt', and the need for the descendants of slave owners and the beneficiaries of slavery to acknowledge their trauma

amidst continuing dehumanisation resulting from the slave trade.

We will look at several examples of practices that help people to identify the effects of trauma, and to distance themselves from those effects. However, these practices can only go so far, and for healing to take place more fully, it requires a further step of addressing relationships.

There are many small-scale initiatives that emerge in communities in response to the immediate challenges relating to violence, housing, employment, education and crime. Often these support African Americans in making sense of and transcending the links between slavery and their day-to-day lived experience of the psycho-social legacies of this trauma. Programmes are beginning to use the theory of PTSS to frame such challenges and to make explicit the connections between current and historical dehumanisation. They further encourage participants to see themselves as more than these traumatic effects.

A significant model of this kind is proposed by Mullan-Gonzalez (2012). This 12-week programme entitled *From the Cotton Fields to the Concrete Jungle* (FCTCJ) works with groups of African American young men who reside in urban areas, arguably a population most vulnerable to typical symptoms of PTSS. The programme



consists of 12 sessions, one per week, each lasting for 90 minutes. The sessions are divided into three phases: Phase 1: The Hood (containing four sessions related to complex trauma, creating a place of mindfulness, and interpersonal connections within the group); Phase 2: The History (containing five sessions related to slavery, the intergenerational transmission of trauma, and PTSS, such as anger, vacant esteem, and racist socialisation); and Phase 3: The Healing (containing three sessions related to the process of guiding the young men towards a healthier, holistic and spiritual way of living) (ibid., p. 131).

In the third session in Phase One, the programme engages participants in experiential activities and cognitive exercises to examine the components and manifestations of direct, secondary and intergenerationally transmitted trauma. The group discusses the harms experienced by African American youths on a daily basis, including complex feelings such as hyper-arousal, intrusion, disconnection, and constriction and numbing. These explorations enable the young people to identify the behaviour patterns that are connected to their vulnerability rooted in unhealed traumas (ibid., p. 167).

The session requires, first, safe facilitated spaces. For example, a ritual of checking-in invites the young people into a common space and mutual presence. Second, the experiential nature of the activities helps the participants to unpack their trauma, some of the effects of which are hidden. Third, through sharing, the participants are able to identify the effects of trauma in their everyday lives, develop better self-awareness, and learn to separate their sense of themselves from these symptoms of harm, especially helplessness and vulnerability (ibid., p. 169). Only then can the group discuss how to heal or repair these harms. For instance, the participants might open up about their experience growing up in the 'hood' where looking scared is not accepted, the dialogue might expand on the 'dangers of attempting to "ignore the bad stuff" or "minimize the pain"' (ibid.) and how some young people act out of anxiety and depression and the effects of trauma which they have internalised.

These steps allow participants to explore healing:

The group is now beginning to form a sense of trust and is witness to the participants' commonality with one another. Examples may be provided, whether in the first or third person, and the psychodynamic process is able to come alive and move the discussion into psychodynamic group work. Throughout the group, facilitators should be making connections between the behaviors, thoughts, actions, and intrapsychic processes that are occurring within the group members. (ibid., p. 168)

The above example illustrates that making sense of trauma can help the wounded to separate herself, as a person, from her experience of trauma, so that she

no longer defines herself in terms of the trauma. This separation requires identifying the trauma that results from wounding and recognising the origins of the wound. It provides an opportunity for taking responsibility for healing. However, this kind of transformation can only go so far without structural shifts in social conditions and public narratives. Healing may be elusive in environments that continue to inflict wounds.

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*Healing may be elusive in environments that continue to inflict wounds.*

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Initiatives that make explicit the connections between the historical dehumanisation and the current plight of individuals and communities and draw attention to the structural elements of this plight are beginning to arise. A key initiative of this kind, Unpacking the Census, launched in Richmond, by Hope in the Cities and associated groups, used census data from 2010 to make explicit the links between historic policies and events in the twentieth century and current data on areas such as poverty and home ownership. The dialogue around this project has helped to pave the way for Richmond's first Office of Community Wealth Building, drawing together the interests of all groups with an awareness of the historical challenges.

Given the need to make sense of trauma in healing, programmes that promote the recognition of dehumanising acts themselves as a form of wounding for those who performed these acts are few. In other words, 'white healing' is still an emerging field. Several organisations such as Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) and White Awake are working to promote awareness amongst non-African Americans regarding past and current injustices, with a view to integrating 'spiritual, educational and cultural change ... into white people's participation in collective liberation' (SURJ, 2020; White Awake, 2020).

A programme that directly targets the need for white awareness of the effects of trauma is the Episcopal Church's Becoming Beloved Community initiative. Their series of dialogues on race, entitled Sacred Ground, invites small groups to explore America's history of racism and whiteness. While some circles are inter-racial, the programme especially encourages people of non-African descent to talk, share and reflect on their fear, guilt, and other negative emotions, which are effects of trauma (The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 2020). Such programmes support participants in recognising the effects of dehumanisation in their own lives and provoke them to shift their understandings about racism. By recognising the legacy of the past on the psyche of those

of European and non-African descent, people can see that they need not collude with white privilege. As a result, many participants are moved to social action.

Another significant initiative working to provoke change in attitudes amongst the 'white' population is the White Ally Toolkit, created by Dr David Campt. The group encourage white 'allies', namely those who already believe racism against persons of colour to be a significant area of concern in North America, to engage with those who are not yet convinced of this. They emphasise the need for a dialogic approach, of listening to the experiences of all, and open and honest exploration of the differences between different perspectives. Through such a process, individuals can begin to understand the truth of the historic and ongoing traumas that are entailed in racist structures, beliefs and acts (White Ally Toolkit, 2020).

In their experiences of working with beneficiaries of the slave trade, David Pettee and Susan Hutchinson emphasise initiatives that bring resistant individuals into 'direct encounter with history' (Pettee and Hutchinson, n.d., p. 10). This may include visiting a family plantation, a slave cemetery, slave quarters, slave marts and pens, reading their ancestor's wills and inventories, or meeting the descendants of enslaved Africans.

It was important for many to find a way to engage their emotional resistance, and we saw how direct encounters with the history of slavery were difficult to rationalize away ... Breaking silence is fundamentally the first step. Then finding the courage to become accountable to family history ... can empower people to ... further heal the legacy of slavery. (ibid., p. 10)

Breaking the historic silence in public discourse is a key step in engaging those of non-African descent to acknowledge the effects of dehumanisation and resultant trauma for both sides, and to act in response to this acknowledgement. This can help develop solidarity with people and communities from all racial backgrounds in challenging racist nationalism.

### 3. Reconnecting to Dignity

Healing approaches that help reclaim dignity enable the wounded of all backgrounds to rise above the negativities and limitations of historically conditioned self-awareness. For persons of African descent, this involves transcending the destructive effects of racial injustice from the times of enslavement until today. Much of this 'programming' or 'ideology' involved regarding people of African descent as less than human, as described in Toni Morrison's (1970) novel *The Bluest Eye*. Healing involves challenging such discourses of institutionalised racism and reconnecting to one's sense of dignity as a person. Such approaches also contribute to developing greater resilience to the harmful effects of traumas.

Dignity has been described as the inherent worth of all human beings, irrespective of their differences (Funk et al., 2015). Dignity is at the core of psychosocial well-being. Increasingly, reconnecting people with their sense of dignity has become part of mental health processes. Such practices tend to have two sources: one is to demonstrate to people from outside of one's own community those aspects of the culture and tradition that command others' respect. In other words, promoting African American culture and its treasures to others may help people of African descent to connect to the dignity of being such a person. The second is to develop an explicit awareness of one's own human dignity regardless of who one is, nor what one has done, nor how one's community is being treated by others.

### *Dignity is at the core of psychosocial well-being.*

Examples of the former are plentiful. We shall mention a few here:

Jazz is deeply rooted in the musical traditions of Africa. For many, it symbolises freedom and empowerment, and a triumph over injustice and oppression. Jazz has played a significant part in advocating the beauty and depth of African culture, breaking down race barriers around the world, and promoting mutual understanding and harmony. The fact that UNESCO has set 30 April each year as International Jazz Day pays tribute to this history and to the contribution of African Americans to global culture. For people of African descent, such recognition may help them reconnect with their own sense of human dignity through celebrating the dignity of being African.

Many nations have designated days or months to raise the need for dialogue around reclaiming human dignity from the histories of oppression. Examples include Black Awareness Day in Brazil (20 November), Afro-Colombian Day in Colombia (21 May) and Black History Month (February in the United States and October in Europe). In addition to their role in public education and awareness-raising about African culture and achievements, they are also opportunities to emphasise the embeddedness of the African in the communities of which they are a part (Bunch, 2018). Likewise, international summits and conferences challenge the lie of Black inferiority, supporting people of African descent to connect to their human dignity (see Community Healing Network, Inc., 2018).

Grassroots initiatives such as the social media campaign #ImAfricanBornIn\_WeAreOne in 2018 may also play a key role in supporting individuals and communities to rebuild a sense of dignity and worth through celebration



of ‘what it is like to be African’. This campaign, which arose out of Valuing Black Lives 2016: The Second Annual Global Emotional Emancipation Summit (Washington DC) is grounded in the belief that ‘reconnecting with each other, with Africa, and with our cultural heritage are crucial steps along the road to destroying the anti-Black narrative that has burdened and limited us for centuries’ (#ImAfricanBornIn, 2018). Through the connections and conversations arising from the initial campaign, which encourages individuals to use the hashtag to share with the world their own experiences of being African, the intention is to ‘develop a common global response to common [(African)] global challenges’ (ibid.). A significant part of these challenges involves the reclamation of dignity in the face of ongoing discrimination.

However, programmes that celebrate the value of African traditions do not always support people of non-African descent in their effort to connect to their own human dignity. Thus, the second approach is also needed. Programmes that are aimed at connecting to inner dignity irrespective of the harm one has suffered or caused, and regardless of one’s merits, are less common. Where they are offered, they tend to have a religious or spiritual element. Often religious rituals and practices, such as prayers or meditation, are offered so that participants can experience a connection to human dignity. Other such programmes involve participants experiencing and sharing a sacred presence or a dialogue with a divine ‘voice’ (Morneau, 2017).

Amongst this latter approach to dignity, there are also healing programmes that employ self-compassion and

self-kindness as pathways to human dignity (Gilbert, 2014). These projects believe that when a person is wounded, their vulnerability can be felt like self-judgement, an internal self-reproach. Self-compassion and self-kindness go beyond understanding the harmful effects on oneself, and involve ending the self-blame and self-criticism, and actively embracing oneself, being kind and loving towards oneself. This constitutes an active reconnection to human dignity (Neff, 2011).

Both approaches, one from without, namely through celebrating the value of African cultures; and one from within, for example in connecting to our innermost dignity, can be parts of healing. The latter are clearly applicable both to the descendants of enslaved people and to the beneficiaries of slavery.

#### 4. Restoring Human Spirit and Wholeness

Many traditional and indigenous approaches to healing focus on restoring the human spirit thereby helping the wounded sense their wholeness as human beings. The wounded tend to experience themselves as divided and broken, and healing will help them transcend fragmented emotional self-relations and self-awareness, and sense themselves as whole (and valuable) persons.

For people of African descent, practices that restore wholeness often draw on traditional arts-based and spiritual approaches. Typically, they aim at two aspects of human experience: on the one hand, there are activities aimed at bringing people together so that they feel part



Community Healing Network’s *Global Truth Tour*. Credit: Community Healing Network <https://communityhealingnet.org/ee-anewkindofdefiance/>

of a greater whole, such as a community or the wider humanity (Garrido et al., 2015). On the other hand, there are processes that enable people to experience themselves as non-fragmented whole persons.

We shall review each of the two categories separately: first, examples that seek to enable the wounded to restore their human spirit by experiencing themselves as part of a greater whole.

Within African communities, music and dance are often understood to be part of healing. In recent years, the alienated black communities of African descent in Brazil have become renowned for the *Jongo*, a tradition of singing and dancing inherited from the times of slavery and core to Afro-Brazilian culture. In 2005, *Jongo* was recognised as part of Brazil's cultural heritage (Tradições Culturais Brasileiras, 2016). Participants dance in a circle at whose centre one individual sings, the person singing alternates and the lyrics are built as a dialogue between the participants. The lyrics transmit oral knowledge enabling participants to connect with the African spiritual world.

The narratives of *Jongo* bear witness to the dehumanisation and suffering of the past, as well as standing as a testament to the resilience of Afro-Brazilians. Engaging in *Jongo* is an experience of empowerment and of connecting with the greater human spirit. The music and dance elements

provide for non-verbal engagement with the feeling of wholeness and togetherness. The significance of *Jongo* is twofold: it brings Afro-Colombian communities a feeling of strength and togetherness, emphasising their narratives of resistance and resilience; it also validates these narratives and spirit of resilience, bringing the plight and the strength of the descendants of enslaved Africans into the public eye.

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### *Practices that restore wholeness often draw on traditional arts-based and spiritual approaches.*

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Similar stories can be told of other traditional cultural manifestations, such as the *música de marimba* in Colombia and *samba* in Brazil. In addition to their capacity for enabling psychosocial healing, they also have the potential to offer a platform to promote dialogue and reconciliation, improve cohesion and civil society participation (Baily, 2019). However, it may be argued, the kind of restoration of spirit described above may be fully possible only when dehumanising economic structures are transformed. Whilst structures continue to wound, minorities' ability to maintain a sense of wholeness and dignity will be inevitably compromised. We shall return to this point in Process 4.



Negro fandango scene at Campo de St. Anna, Rio de Janeiro, Watercolour by Augustus Earle, c. 1822. National Library of Australia, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4990696>



Second, let us look at two cases of enabling the restoration of one's self-experience as a whole person. Traditional theatre, music and dance, such as those we saw as part of *The Maaafa Suite*, promote recognition of self as valuable and whole, both through shifting narratives and through non-verbal engagement. Engagement with music has been linked with a wealth of positive responses, such as feelings of belonging and security, as well as with signs of physical well-being (Matthews, 2019). The Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy, NYU offers music therapy to people suffering from trauma and in the words of a participant: 'Music gives all a chance to express ourselves, to share our souls, to share our feelings with each other' (American Music Therapy Association, 2006).

Indigenous spiritual healers can also play a role in restoring people to a sense of (spiritual) wholeness. According to Paulino (1996, p. 113), 'indigenous healers can function as a vehicle for empowering spiritually-oriented clients who perceive themselves as powerless or as being systematically oppressed by the larger social structure'. As Sutherland (2011, pp. 47–8) describes, in the context of a study with Caribbean women:

what is possible in the metaphors of traditional healing practices is that a particularised history of dislocation, subjugation and spiritual brutality can be retold, current traumatic experiences can be expressed and the imagined community and traditions of their ancestral homeland can be symbolically reconstructed to bring about healing and empowerment.

Practices such as meditation, mindfulness, self-forgiveness, and so forth may also be understood to support individuals to reconnect with their sense of whole being.

## DISCUSSION

To address the wounds inflicted by dehumanising acts requires all four approaches highlighted above: (1) identifying and contextualising trauma; (2) making sense of trauma and understanding its harmful effects; (3) connecting to human dignity; and (4) transcending fragmentation and restoring awareness of one's wholeness. In effect, these four processes help the person to deeply see herself as more than the harmful effects of the trauma.

Although the traumatic effects on the beneficiaries of slave trade and slavery are not widely recognised, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge such traumas and recognise such effects which may help the descendants of the beneficiaries of the slave trade and slavery overcome blindness to their white privilege, and accompanied feelings of guilt and anxiety. Healing of people from both sides is necessary to end the cycles

of racial violence as well as unconscious and conscious racism and discrimination.

No doubt, many of the beneficiaries of slavery would not agree with the idea that they suffer from traumatic effects and that racism is such an effect. They tend not to identify with their white privilege and, even if they did, they tend to not perceive the arrogance, closed-ness, indifference and social divisions that accompany such privilege as a dehumanising harmful effect of slavery and racism. This indicates that more work is required on defining this process and more awareness is required with regard to 'white healing'. For instance, Judith Katz (1978) has developed a handbook for anti-racist training for people of European descent.

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*Healing of people from both sides is necessary to end the cycles of racial violence.*

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The above indicates that Process Two has very different features for people of European descent and people of African descent and that these processes need to be separate. The processes of healing for both groups are very different and to respect the needs of each, they should be separated and designed distinctly.

The separation has important consequences for the relationship between Processes Two and Three. It means that Process Two is essentially incomplete until it is accompanied by Process Three. As we shall see, Process Three needs to aim at transcending identities based on binaries, specifically those pertaining to victim and aggressor. But, as we have seen, Process Two tends to reinforce those identities: as people come to identify and understand their trauma, they will tend to see themselves as belonging to either the victims' or the aggressors' group. This is inherent in the programmes aimed at making sense of trauma, grieving past atrocities and building resilience. Even those approaches that seek to restore and strengthen the participants' sense of human dignity, restoring their human spirit as whole persons, there are such tendencies of racially dividing people into opposing camps. Therefore, Process Two needs to have built into its preparation the idea that such antagonistic identities will be challenged in Process Three.

With the four key healing elements working in concert, the descendants of enslaved Africans and of the beneficiaries of slavery may feel more free to break away from the harmful effects of dehumanisation and to collectively reflect on the survivors' wisdom, strength and resilience.

## C. PROCESS THREE: DIRECTED AT RELATIONSHIPS

The effects of dehumanisation include hostile relationships, indifference, mutual ignorance and alienation. Healing encompasses processes in which people develop better relationships that involve as a minimum a mutual recognition of each other as persons of equal worth (Gill and Thomson, 2019).

People harmed by a mass atrocity, such as slavery, and its legacies, such as racism, may feel that their sense of themselves is defined by the trauma as a victim, especially in the context of systemic racism (DeGruy, 2017). People of European descent often defend themselves by thinking that 'slavery happened a long time ago' and by denying its oppressive legacy.

Healing processes directed towards relationships will involve transcending antagonistic identity categories such as white versus black, perpetrator versus victim and us versus them. Such processes will foster historical perceptions that don't propagate feelings of hostility and indifference and this requires that people develop the capacity to become close to others. This means overcoming ignorance and self-absorption and nurturing an awareness of oneself and others as 'we'.

The identification of people of African descent as lesser arose in part from their transportation and use as slaves on a commercial scale and their systematic treatment as objects for economic gain during the birth of capitalism. The categorical racial division between white and black developed from these practices and as an attempt to legitimise the slave trade and slavery. As Frederick Douglass pointed out:

The whole argument in defense of slavery becomes utterly worthless the moment the African is proved to be equally a man with the Anglo-Saxon. The temptation, therefore, to read the Negro out of the human family is exceedingly strong. (Douglass, 1854)

This racist ideology became part of a socio-economic system that ensured the political and economic domination of Europeans and the oppression of people of African descent. The ideology of white superiority and black inferiority became normalised legally and racism became integral to the social structure and

to many people's psyche (Butler, 1993; cf. Horsman, 1981). People of African American descent often tend to see those of European descent as the oppressor or perpetrator, and those of European descent often tend to perceive African American people as lesser or as victims. Over time, these typifications become ingrained in groups' collective memory, and dehumanised relationships became the norm, seemingly resistant to transformation. Beyond the identity discourses of race lies an economic paradigm that makes inhumanity possible by treating human life as a mere cost for the sake of financial gain. Healing directed at relational transformation will transcend the practices of profit over persons and it will nurture an awareness of the intrinsic value of being human within relationships.

With regard to the third healing process, there are several contentions that arise in the literature from these and other considerations:

Race tends to be characterised as an identity (Fields, 2001; Carter, 2008). However, the more racism is perceived and confronted as an ideology, the more it emphasises people's reactions to the psychological effects of racism, and the more it obscures its structural expressions (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Discrimination and injustice are reproduced and perpetuated by the system through economic priorities, political objectives, laws and regulations. Emphasising racism as an identity ideology may undermine the understanding that racism is more deeply a structural feature of society (Essed, 1991). Dehumanising relations are a part of African American people's everyday lived realities in schools, hospitals, courts, workplaces, and on the street, but many people think of these realities as a relational problem between groups, thus masking the structural features of society that define the power relations shaping such relationships. This suggests that healing directed to relationships is not merely a process of reconciliation between individuals as representatives of social groups, but that it also requires institutional reform.

As a lens to approach healing, race can be complicated. On the one hand, some writers have questioned whether race should be the main concern for relational transformation (Ossorio, 2011). They argue that, as an identity category, race tends to accentuate divisions, in part because of the many sentiments attached to race such as humiliation, anger, guilt, arrogance, fear and mistrust. On the other hand, healing seems to require working through and transcending these feelings. Furthermore, confronting the narratives of race identities that have enabled enslavement and present-day racism is also a necessary step in healing, even if the historical roots of racism were largely economic. These points indicate that Process

*The effects of dehumanisation include hostile relationships, indifference, mutual ignorance and alienation.*



*Dehumanising relations are a part of African American people's everyday lived realities in schools, hospitals, courts, workplaces, and on the street.*

Three of our healing framework requires going beyond relationships defined by race.

Forgiveness as a concept, together with its role in reconciliation, has been understood very differently. Often it is conceptualised as a conscious act of releasing feelings of resentment towards a person or a group who has harmed one, regardless of whether they deserve that forgiveness (Gill, 2017). For some, this should be unmediated and absolute (Derrida, 2001). For others, forgiveness is relational. Some writers claim that forgiveness separates the agents of wrongdoing from the actions themselves, and thus it can transcend the actors' guilt or remorse, thereby altering the ethical significance of the past (Arendt, 1958/1994), and even purifying it (Lévinas, 1969). Others argue that dehumanisation on the scale of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is unforgivable (Arendt, 1958/1994).

Similarly, as an act, forgiveness invites many questions. Does forgiveness condone structural violence? Is forgiveness compatible with justice? (Radzik, 2008). Processes of forgiveness may make those who have been hurt feel coerced or under social pressure to forgive, which renders the process unjust (Jankélévitch, 1996). Indeed, such processes may seem to tolerate continued social injustices and make reconciliation more distant. This suggests that forgiveness cannot be a precondition or an expectation in the process of healing relationships.

There is a rich array of practices concerning healing relationships and interpersonal reconciliation. This Desk Review has identified five domains of action.

*Transcending Binaries.* Practices in this domain involve creating safe spaces for participants to experience each other as persons, and to become more free of the antagonisms embedded in the exclusionary ways of self-identifying. Such awareness paves the way to exploring ways to self-identify that are more inclusive and therefore have healing power.

*Re-Affirming Meaningful Narratives.* Practitioners in this area see that human narratives intersect at multiple levels: stories from the same person; those of a group; and those that cross cultures (Baumeister et al., 1990; Fivush et al., 2011). A key for moving

towards more human relationships is the sharing of narratives that cross such intersections (Pasupathi et al., 2016). These highlight what people have in common and, in this way, story sharing undermines dehumanisation.

*Forgiveness and Reconciliation.* These practices focus on the harms of dehumanisation and the needs of victims, and tend to stress the responsibilities of the agents who have performed or benefited from the act of wounding to set right the wrongs done. Some practitioners include a community-based restorative justice element to practices of forgiveness and reconciliation. This element shifts away from legal punishment towards truth-telling and relational restoration (Gailey, 2015).

*Building Trust.* Mutual trust requires the goodwill to let go of suspicions and misgivings, and to show trust before one is trusted. Trust takes time, because it is the fruit of relational processes. When applied as a healing approach, activities of trust building include offering opportunities for participants to show humility and vulnerability, to listen and to be heard, to have open and honest conversations about the things that are blocking human relationships, to care about others with genuine curiosity and to offer one's presence to the other.

*Co-action.* This is closely connected to trust building, and these two are bound up in almost one process. Integral to healing the relationships is the commitment from the community to support a proactive process of seeking structural justice and socio-economic political systems that are humanising. Co-action is to diagnose together systemic malaises and live out new narratives expressing shared aspirations of collective well-being.

Although these are separate tasks of Process Three, we can see that all five healing approaches and practices are intertwined and integral.

## 1. Transcending Binaries

Programmes aimed at addressing the binaries of identity tend to assume that when we identify with a social group, such identity is necessarily exclusionary. However, there is also an understanding that due to the wounds of slavery, for some African Americans, the declaration 'Black is my identity' may be more than an affirmation of belonging, but also a reminder of collective suffering, both past and present. This recognition provides the starting point to explore how a group's collective identity is intimately bound up with their socio-economic and political lives. Healing directed to dehumanised relationships must involve processes whereby personal relationships are possible through mutual recognition of one another

primarily as humans, that is prior to social identities likely to be political and alienating. It is necessary to contrast personal relationships with impersonal ones because the latter are more imbued with power dynamics and dehumanisation.

Many programmes aim to transcend the us-versus-them binary, and here we will draw on two examples.

### a. Healing Wounds of History workshops

The Healing the Wounds of History (HWH) programmes were developed originally in Lebanon with the aim of cultivating self-awareness, developing human relationships and creating an alliance of agents of change who will take the spirit of healing to their respective communities (Healing the Wounds of History, 2019a). Inspired by a vision concerning the potential of transforming inter-generational cycles of pain and violence, HWH programmes focus on facilitating safe spaces for participants to experience and develop a transformed sense of self and attitudes towards others. This approach includes self-narrating, group-based exercises, rituals, visualisation, deep contemplation, expressive arts and body movement (Gill, 2015).

One of the aims of the HWH workshop is to transcend the binary of victim and perpetrator. Facilitators recognise the limitations of external identity labels, and therefore do not encourage participants to talk about themselves from these perspectives. Instead, as an introduction, participants are given the opportunity to present themselves in their own ways, such as through a story that is significant for them or sharing some aspect of themselves that is not obvious to a stranger. This approach to self-introduction is especially helpful in contexts such as Lebanon, where people are used to being categorised according to sectarian divides.

Several HWH activities are powerful in transcending victim-vs-perpetrator and us-vs-them binaries and here we describe two of them.

#### *Circle of Sharing*

Participants sit in a circle, each holding an object collected from a garden in the previous session, such as a stone, a feather, a pine cone or a piece of fruit. The object is supposed to represent how each person identifies herself. The participants take turns to share their stories, using the object as the conversation starter. When one person shares, everyone else listens. There is no pre-arranged sequence concerning turns to speak, and each person only speaks when she feels ready. The sharing continues until all stories are heard, after which, the participants are invited to reflect on what they have heard. The reflections tend to focus on the overall effect of listening to these diverse stories, such as: 'What has touched me and why?';

'How does a particular story resonate with me so much?'; 'In what ways does my own story shift after hearing the stories in the circle?'

Once the process is completed, each object is rich with personal significance and it is placed on an altar-like stand, a candle is lit in the middle to pay tribute to the stories. The participants stand in a circle around these objects to honour these symbols of human life. In this ritual, the layers of each person's human presence or life is celebrated: sorrow and joy; suffering and resilience; hatred and compassion; loss and belonging; alienation and intimacy; ignorance and care.

These processes facilitate a feeling of openness. As the Circle is safe and undemanding, there is little resistance or defence. Instead, with time in the garden and with the symbolic object, the participants are more ready to go inward and explore their experiences, feelings, and ways of being in the world. When each person shares, they offer the intimate details of their life to the circle, to the space held together by the group. This can allow the person to be vulnerable, to be emotional, to go deeper, to be more reflective. In so doing, the Circle invites people to attend to human experiences of others as such. By gently opening the doors to each other, each person becomes more real in ways that transcend social categories.

Circles of Sharing engender a closeness amongst the participants which is not pre-determined by a solidarity based on the same social identity. The closeness is inspired by empathising with the stranger and feeling that her life matters to oneself. Such sharing enables people to enter one another's experiential realities, and seems to take human interaction to another level, where common human experiences are ennobled, and antagonistic identities are transcended.

#### *Mutual Presence*

The HWH Programme also creates a space for non-verbal and embodied mutual presence (Marcel, 1951). In this activity, the participants are invited to stand in two circles – an inner and an outer. Each circle contains an equal number of participants. The exercise involves each pair facing each other and looking into each other's eyes for one minute, without words or movements. They are simply holding the other person's gaze for one minute.

Initially, some participants find the experience uncomfortable. Some become self-conscious, or embarrassed, some feel withdrawn, and others helpless. However, with the guidance of the facilitator, participants tend to let go of their discomfort and insecurity and feel mutually affirmed by the sustained gaze. Unmediated human intimacy is rare. Yet, this experiential exercise can enable each person to feel appreciated, which allows him or her to feel more able to appreciate the other in ways



that go beyond identity labels. This activity is considered one of the most transformative experiences of the HWH programme (Gill, 2016). Both HWH practices create a tapestry of humanness and illustrate one can self-identify without gender, trauma and race being the only defining factors.

### **b. Healing the Wounds of History: Drama therapy, Playback Theatre and Psychodrama**

Developed by Armand Volkas, Healing the Wounds of History is a set of experiential practices for those who share a legacy of historical atrocity. Participants include descendants of both sides of historical atrocities, such as descendants of Jewish Holocaust survivors and of the Third Reich; Palestinians and Israelis; Armenians and Turks, Turks and Kurds, and African Americans and European Africans. The workshop helps participants work through the burden of the trauma by transforming their pain into constructive action (Healing the Wounds of History, 2019b). The work takes a psychological approach to conflict and provides a 'map' to help both groups to traverse the emotional terrains of reconciliation. It consists of a five-step process:

*Breaking the taboo:* Speaking to the 'enemy' is often perceived as a betrayal. So, the first step is creating an opportunity for people from polarised groups to break the taboo by stepping over an invisible barrier preventing their contact, and engage in conversations that help them to work through the layers of unresolved feelings they carry about each other.

*Humanising relationships:* Once the space is open for encounter, the next step involves participants telling, listening to, and acting on each other's stories, including pains and sufferings. Stepping into each other's shoes through role-reversal (through drama and theatre) is powerful in transforming relationships. The participants begin to care about one another, which nurtures empathy and friendship. Drama and theatre work create a double-bind which participants must resolve: 'How can I hate these people and have empathy for them at the same time?'

*Accepting collective responsibility:* As trust is developing in the group, in the third phase, the participants explore and own the potential in all of us to take part in dehumanising acts. As the group becomes aware of everyone's capacity for cruelty, the boundaries between the victim and the perpetrator start to dissolve. This ownership of human imperfection opens the door to mutual recognition of one's own moral vulnerability but also our collective strength which urges us to assume greater responsibility for righting past wrongs.

*Grieving together:* The fourth step consists of moving into grief. This is regarded as essential to honour the human suffering of the past, and our ancestors' pains and losses.

Unless pain and loss are grieved fully, the legacy will be passed on to the next generation. Grieving is a way to end the cycles of violence.

*Commemoration:* In the fifth step, the group creates commemorative performances and rituals of remembrance to publicly acknowledge the difficult history they share. Rituals offer a way for people to channel their feelings in an aesthetic form, whilst public commemorations help extend the reconciliation and transformed relationships into society by touching the awareness of those who did not participate in the workshops. When people carry a legacy of historical trauma, the past may remain as something horrible and heavy. The project encourages participants to continue to use creativity with a view to turning the legacies of horror into beauty and light.

In summary, although the two case studies are different, they do share some important features such as the opportunity to encounter 'the Other', and the experience of multi-layered humanness. Both help break socially determined identity divides, such as victim-vs-perpetrator, and transcend the binary of the antagonistic us-vs-them, by providing a space where former enemies can enter each other's realities as *we*.

## **2. Re-Affirming Meaningful Narratives**

It is not enough to simply remember the narratives of the past; it is core to healing that people can reconnect to meaningfulness, despite their trauma. To this end, many programmes directed at relational transformation offer workshops in which narratives of suffering and loss might be shifted through respectful listening. When participants come together and challenge the ideology of white 'normalcy' and black 'degradation', feelings towards the other can be transformed. In re-articulating the meanings of one's own life, these programmes help people from all backgrounds to move from their current preoccupations with 'what is' towards a focus on 'what might be', thereby introducing hope and opening doors for human relationships.

In the last decades, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) has been a key player in funding workshops and research that promotes the transformation of interracial relationships in North America, with a focus on 'debunking' the historical narratives that place Blackness as inferior to Whiteness. Since 2010, their America Healing initiative has been addressing the need for racial

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*It is core to healing that people can reconnect to meaningfulness, despite their trauma.*

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healing, including the wounds of trans-Atlantic slavery. The WKKF programmes stress the importance of shifting the narratives around racial divides towards the common humanity of all. Below we give examples of two of their flagship programmes: their Racial Healing Circles and their Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation initiative. These programmes recognise the structural influences on human relationships, such as socio-economic processes and education (Kellogg, 2016).

### a. Racial Healing Circles

Racial Healing Circles (RHCs) are workshops that provide safe spaces for individuals to explore their own and others' lives. Participants engage with *what ifs* concerning wounding, reconciliation and healing, in groups of up to 30, in workshops lasting up to one full day. Each workshop involves sharing personal experiences, with a purpose of reaffirming the humanity of all. The circles are characterised by *openness, intentional listening and mutual respect* with provocative prompts such as sharing a memory of one of the first moments one realised people are different; describing a moment of feeling affirmed as a human being; describing an experience that caused one to feel the power to thrive; or sharing personal stories about one's own transformation, and what such transformation entails.

Sharing these personal experiences engages the participants emotionally, which helps raise awareness of one's feelings towards the past horrors, and those who represent the Other, including personal prejudice. Also, the sharing enables participants to express what otherwise would be mere raw emotions and interpret them meaningfully in the processes of narrating, and allows them to attend to each other empathically. Above all, in the RHCs, participants develop new senses of meaning, by sharing narratives, as well as new possibilities for relationships. According to participants:

[C]onnecting different experiences to our common humanity is more than a blending of stories. It's about co-creating social connections of mutual respect and a common set of morals, principles, wisdom and guidance that is written on our hearts, captured in our beliefs and demonstrated in how we treat each other as human beings. (Kellogg, 2017)

By providing the opportunity to hear the experiences and perspectives of those they do not usually identify with, participants find themselves recognising their shared humanity, which leads to relationships beyond social boundaries, such as race and class. It equally explores some of the gendered dimensions of human experiences, and how gender affects one's self-narrative, and how our

gender identity and attitudes towards gender have shaped our experiences.

### b. Narrative Change and Relationship Building

Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) aims at helping communities to heal and transform. The TRHT Framework consists of five areas: narrative change, racial healing and relationship building, separation, law and economy. The first two constitute its core pillars and exemplify how people can come together, transform their narratives, and develop human relationships. As narrative change, reassumed meaningfulness and relational transformation are interconnected, we shall treat them as one process.

The TRHT recognises that in North America, people's life narratives have been shaped by an ideology of racism, which justified economic expansion through slavery. It seeks to create 'new authentic stories that honor the complexity of the past while forging a more equitable future' (Godsil and Goodale, 2013).

The TRHT starts with a Community Assessment in which people document the community's racial history, such as understanding how neighbourhood residents have changed over time and where people have moved and why. The Community Assessment process involves a 'survey' of community racial relations which includes talking to all stakeholders in the community, meeting leaders and community representatives, getting information about people's lived realities, facts checking, in-depth interviews and conversations with leaders of different communities at all levels, with former and current public officials, and with students and scholars at the university.

This preparation is followed by healing sessions similar to the Racial Healing Circles. In this process, people who previously would not have come together can feel that they are closer to one another. Often in the sharing and listening, participants begin to notice the changes in their narratives; they become less scripted and more meaningful. For instance, one participant says: 'You could feel some of the pretence wash away, and people began an honest exploration or reflection of themselves.' Another woman recalls, 'I talked not so much about the negatives of oppression, but how proud I was to be an African American woman, and where I thought that came from for me.' Almost all the participants noted that they are more able to empathise with those who were formerly distant and segregated.

Narrative change reaffirms the meaningfulness of life: the person can recognise that his or her life has an intelligible sense and has some purpose beyond suffering. Narrational processes can help people structure their life-story in a more coherent way. The narrative change highlights some



of the richer aspects of a person's life, thus rendering it more meaningful (Thomas, 2019). The reassumed meaningfulness enables participants to recognise the 'psychological wall' that separates 'us' and 'them' (Volkan, 2019). It serves as a starting point for the participants to be motivated to work together towards transformation (see WKKF's work in section 4 below).

### 3. Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Past trauma tends to leave 'stings' or scars in our emotional memory which could be passed from one generation to another. These arise from anger, fear, judgement, guilt and misconceptions. Unless these resentments are removed through forgiveness, compassion and understanding, they will continue to serve as triggers of negative emotions and hostility towards oneself or others. Healing our own past is the beginning of taking responsibility to end the trans-generationally transmitted trauma and to stop the associated violence (Asseily, 2007; Volkan, 1999, 2005).

Constructive forgiveness allows perpetrators to acknowledge their responsibility and to show remorse. It can facilitate healing, not only of the offender and survivors, but also for a wider group of people harmed by an act, when it involves other members of the perpetrator and survivor groups. Forgiveness processes can reframe

the profile of the victims in a more inclusive manner to involve all parties that have been hurt because of the original wrongdoing. Initiatives that facilitate such openness to forgiveness tend to provide the opportunity to recognise the humanity of both sides and to separate the dehumanising act from the actors. An example of such an initiative is Coming to the Table's iconic *Linked Descendants* programme.

#### a. Coming to the Table: Linked Descendants programme

Initially an oral history project, Coming to the Table (CTTT)'s Linked Descendants programme was established with a view to mapping American people's family histories. The project is now renowned for providing a safe space to support individuals in their process of understanding the history of their ancestors and making connections with other people whose stories are entwined with their own. Through this growing network, descendants of slave-owners are enabled to connect with descendants of those whom their ancestors enslaved and vice versa. Underpinned by CTTT's strong values of honesty, compassion and mercy, the Linked Descendants programme facilitates transformative experiences through coming together, and listening to each other's truths.



A *Coming to the Table* workshop. Credit: Coming to the Table, <https://comingtothetable.org/workshops/>

The programme starts with participants rethinking their relationships with the past and with those who are different from them. Participants explore the same themes in pairs, and then in small groups. In this manner, linked descendants build life-changing connections. In virtue of the intimacy this facilitates, participants tend to be more open and honest about their experiences and feelings and become more empathetic. In the next phase of the activity, participants may feel freer to atone and to forgive, on their own behalf and on behalf of the generations who inflicted and sustained the original wounds.

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*Healing our own past is the beginning of taking responsibility to end trans-generationally transmitted trauma.*

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One feature of the Linked Descendants Programme is the participants' recognition of their connection to slavery through ownership, kinship, or violence. They explore the often-silenced truths about slavery, such as lynching and rape, and together they examine family archives and memorabilia. Also, the Programme has involved journeys together to historical sites that connect them, such as graveyards or plantations. Sometimes, they embrace each other as part of a new-found family. The activities are guided by a set of values and intentions, including, for instance, attending to diverse opinions, stories and experiences, showing respect and loving kindness towards difference, uncovering and telling the truth of American history, identifying how people are linked through their heritage of slavery, and cultivating the capacity to express and experience compassion and mercy. In doing so, the programme seeks to explore justice in large institutional ways and in smaller personal and family or community ways, contribute to healing the harms of racism and the legacies of slavery, and build peace in the communities and beyond.

The workshops involve carefully designed steps to ensure that the spaces remain safe, inclusive and respectful. These include: Touchstone Agreements, Use of Circle Processes, Shared Values, Strategies for Trauma Awareness & Resilience, Restorative Justice, Uncovering History, Building Connections, Healing Together, and Taking Action. The fruit of these various steps can be forgiveness and reconciliation. Some acknowledge the past wrong and are willing to forgive and let go of resentment and hate; some experience remorse and want to atone and

right the wrong; others experience compassion for each other and reconcile.

Many groups of descendants feel moved to document their experiences of meeting and getting to know one another, including the challenges they faced and continue to face in exploring the painful past and its legacies. CTTT provides a public space for participants in the programme to share their stories of struggle and reconciliation in public blog posts (BitterSweet, 2020).

There are other forgiveness initiatives such as The Forgiveness Project, which collects and promotes inspiring personal stories of forgiveness experiences (The Forgiveness Project, 2020) and in Colombia, the School of Forgiveness and Reconciliation (ESPERE) (Naevez, 2009). One common feature is the blog which brings the personal narratives to the general public. This kind of engagement can lead to a shift in public perspectives and a ripple effect of more openness towards forgiveness.

#### 4. Trust-Building and Co-Action

New narratives that transcend binaries pave the way for building relationships of mutual trust across groups. Such relationships are often instantiated as coercion or 'doing together'. As more people engage in collaborative action, the deeper the integration between groups becomes especially when accompanied by trust-building and inter-group dialogue.

Practices towards trust-building tend to be rooted in the harmonious relationships that form the backbone of a community. Trust-building programmes stress the importance of safe spaces for sharing, recognising human dignity, understanding the historical contexts of the community and creating common platforms for co-action. Trust is a necessary foundation for collective action, and it is anchored in deeper mutual understanding and appreciation (see Godsil and Goodale, 2013).

Such processes are exemplified in the work of Hope in the Cities (HIC), which began 30 years ago in Richmond, and which has been replicated in various cities across the world.

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*New narratives that transcend binaries pave the way for building relationships of mutual trust across groups.*

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### a. Hope in the Cities: Trust-building and co-action

Until 1865, Richmond was the Confederate capital and the United States' largest interstate slave market. In 1991, *Initiatives of Change* launched the Hope in the Cities (HIC) movement, inviting all citizens to have 'honest conversations' on race. HIC is a citizen-led, community-based effort that engages people across the political spectrum and religious divides. It was one of six organisations which collaborated in writing a dialogue guide for President Clinton's *One America Initiative*.

According to HIC's founder, Rob Corcoran, there are four key ingredients for trust in the community. The first is self-reflection: by living self-reflectively, each person can model the change we want to see around us. The second is openness, hospitality and listening: everyone is welcome to the table and the conversation, and once there, we shall be hospitable towards each other and listen to others including those who we previously found it difficult to get along with. The third is the acknowledgement of a difficult history and honouring the stories of each person and community. The fourth is building and sustaining a team, including an informal network of people who care and can rely on each other. These informal networks provide moral and spiritual support for courageous initiatives (Corcoran, 2010, pp. 14–17).

We shall focus here on HIC's *community dialogue programme* that has recently become a model for

community-based trust-building programmes across the globe. The programme has three key guiding principles: (1) *Honest conversation* – every participant is willing to take a risk by committing to honesty and candour in all dialogues. (2) *Personal responsibility* – each person takes responsibility for the challenges of racial division within our communities and nation; instead of pointing to others as the problem, everyone will recognise their own participation in an unjust system. (3) *Acts of reconciliation* – each person will commit to acts of reconciliation as part of public events that acknowledge the community's history. The HIC Community Dialogue Programme consists of six sessions:

*Session 1: Beginning the Conversation.* The introduction is conducted in a safe environment where participants share their motivation for joining the dialogue, including awareness of the racial differences and separation in the community. The group creates ground rules, shares hopes for time together, and agrees to take responsibility for keeping spaces safe and inclusive.

*Session 2: Experiences of Race and Community.* Participants recall and reflect on what it felt like living in the community in the past and discuss the current experiences, both positive and negative, of the same place, including attitudes and relationships.

*Session 3: Experiences and History.* Participants enter a dialogue and share personal as well as group experiences



Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Summit 2016: Trustbuilding, Richmond, VA. Courtesy of Rob Corcoran



of affirmation and discrimination and their perceptions of diversity, differences, discrimination and privilege.

*Session 4: Forgiveness and Atonement.* Reflection on forgiveness and repentance, and whether they are part of the racial reconciliation process. Personal experiences (of forgiveness and repentance, both giving and receiving) are shared so that the group can explore the power and challenge of forgiveness and repentance in restoring relationships and reconciliation.

*Session 5: Building Hope for the Future.* As the trust within the group increases, participants explore a common vision of the future for the community, such as envisaging the kind of experiences where there is genuine racial reconciliation and justice. The group also discusses and imagines the political, economic, social, or cultural structures that can sustain trust and relational harmony in the city. The conversation further touches upon institutional policies and practices, including education, health, other aspects of public lives that can be transformed, and to do so, what specific steps and actions are required to move towards this hopeful vision, and what obstacles to overcome, and who would take the initiative and begin to develop partnerships.

*Session 6: Building a Future of Hope.* Inspired by the hope for the future, the group enters a final phase of 'Planning for Action'. Individually and collectively, participants pledge on specific actions to follow up, and discuss how they can commit to these actions, integrating the 'I' into the 'we'.

### **b. Arts-based programmes: cultural engagement towards trust and coaction**

Following mass atrocity, people may experience cultural trauma – the loss of their culture. This has ramifications for one's sense of identity and dignity. Arts and music seem to be able to play a key role in healing as a virtue of their ability to begin to create a culture within which a community can be embedded (Koh, 2019).

There are many programmes that employ the arts to bring communities together, through collaboration on creative projects which forge meaningful connections and build trust. A good example is the *Music for Reconciliation* programme created by *National Batuta Foundation*, a Colombian initiative established in 1991, which helps rebuild social relations and reintegrate victims of the armed conflict, contributing to reconciliation.

*Following mass atrocity, people may experience cultural trauma – the loss of their culture.*

Participants report that the experience of making music together reduces their vulnerability to violence and helps build more meaningful relationships with those both inside and outside of their close network (Baily, 2019). Another example, *City at Peace*, is an initiative based in Washington DC, which brings together 130 teenagers twice a year to create a musical theatre production based on the struggles experienced in their lives. Students are guided through theatre training, improvisation, singing, dancing, and life story sharing towards developing intercultural relationships. Through the process, the young people find themselves developing a richer understanding of the prevalent dehumanising narratives and more open to embracing difference (Atlas Performing Arts Center, 2020). There are also similar initiatives focused around sport, such as *Flames*, a youth sports team in Brooklyn, which brings young people from diverse backgrounds to play sports together. The experience of working towards a shared goal helps to break down social divisions and to deepen human connections, which empowers communities to work together for the wider social good (Anderson et al., 1999).

Building trust and co-action relies on human relationships, which in turn enrich human relationships. Programmes, such as HIC's Community Dialogue, illustrate that facilitated safe spaces and guided processes of sharing, listening, dialogue and introspection are imperative for transcending differences and bringing people and groups together.

## **DISCUSSION**

Case studies discussed in this section suggest that programmes for healing relationships work best when they transcend binaries, especially the victim-perpetrator distinction, through deep narrative sharing in safe and private spaces constructed for empathetic listening. On the one hand, such processes allow the person speaking to feel appreciated and understood. On the other, such processes allow the listeners to feel a solidarity that is not restricted by racial and other social divides. Furthermore, entering the experiential space of another person can be a transformative experience that allows a shift in a person's own identifications. This shift allows for the collective construction of new and less scripted collective narratives which can be part of a building of trust.

In reviewing the healing potential of these projects and programmes, we can also conclude that although Process Three works towards forgiveness and reconciliation, this cannot be regarded as a goal of the process. Participants taking part in programmes geared towards building relationships would naturally express themselves in terms of forgiveness and reconciliation but the acts of asking for forgiveness and offering forgiveness should not be viewed as a predetermined goal.

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*Programmes for healing relationships work best when they transcend binaries through deep narrative sharing.*

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Examples in Process Three further highlight an important tension between risk and trust. To be honest and open is to take risk. There is the risk of offending and being offended, risk of being judged and judging, and risk of being vulnerable and making others feel vulnerable. Such approaches and practices open up feelings of anger and fear, and all the reactions that accompany such feelings. However, to build trust requires that a person is open in ways that touch the common humanity of the group so that social divides are transcended.<sup>17</sup> Thus such a tension is necessary to be embraced by programmes in Process Three.

An important unresolved question pertaining to Process Three is when to explicitly introduce racism as a theme. In contrast to CTTT and RHC, the programmes of Healing the Wounds of History and TRHT don't start with race: they begin with people talking about themselves and recognising themselves and others as persons. The

idea is that by gaining an intimate insight into the lived experience of another person, one immediately cuts through and transcends the socially imposed binaries that often characterise relationships. In contrast, other programmes confront and work through the misapprehensions and mistrust that form psychological barriers, which includes the strong feelings of anger and fear mentioned earlier.

Case studies in Process Three also suggest that characterising racism from a purely identity or ideological perspective may not be conducive to healing directed at relationships. In Process Two, it has served as a reminder of how racist narratives enabled the enslavement of African Americans and their continuation today. Such ideologies were and are created to serve economic purposes and, with respect to Process Three, they can hamper the experience of transcending antagonistic social identities to touch our common human identity. In this sense, programmes that transform relationships require a different paradigm, one that overcomes the instrumental mentality that sees humans and their labour only as necessary costs for the sake of economic gain. Healing that cultivates an awareness of the intrinsic value of persons should be set against a mentality that places profit over people and wealth over human well-beings.

## D. PROCESS FOUR: DIRECTED AT STRUCTURAL DEHUMANISATION AND SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION

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Slavery contributed importantly to the wealth of the West. In 1860, 80% of the gross national product of the United States was tied to slavery (Anderson, 2016). More generally, the economic prosperity of Western Europe and North America is largely due to a system of dehumanisation that included slavery, colonisation and genocide, which caused unimaginable bloodshed and suffering, and which has also caused continuing exploitation and oppression (Baptist, 2014). This has left many countries in Africa, the Caribbean and South America materially impoverished, economically underdeveloped and politically vulnerable. It has left many peoples socially divided and spiritually wounded. For people in these regions, and for African Americans, healing directed at changing the socio-structural conditions of society is paramount. Without systemic transformation, other healing processes will tend only to scratch the surface.

In the Conceptual Note (Gill and Thomson, 2019b), we indicated some conditions for a redesigned politico-economic system. For instance, condemning structural dehumanisation would require publicly disavowing narratives that support the continuous discrimination

of people of African descent. This may entail breaking silence about the history of the slave trade and slavery and teaching history in ways that can transcend ignorance, overcome indifference and challenge racism. Equally, it is necessary to change policies and institutional practices that are unjust and discriminatory. Furthermore, we need to change governance processes and institutional structures that treat human beings merely as a means to economic gain. These are all part of systems of production that have been normalised and plagued contemporary global societies (Foucault, 1975). This is a monumental task because abolishing racist capitalism would mean a fundamental change in the values that our institutions are built on: towards the recognition of the intrinsic value

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*The economic prosperity of Western Europe and North America is largely due to a system of dehumanisation that included slavery, colonisation and genocide.*

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<sup>17</sup> Facilitators of Process Three need to be aware of this tension.

of human well-being and the equal value of all persons. This is the reverse of what we have now: practices that put wealth accumulation before well-being.

Given that such a paradigm shift is an ideal, we can recommend some small reforming steps as starting points. Here we will briefly outline three proposals already put forward: history education, legal reforms, and economic processes.

## 1. History Education

One of the well-quoted phrases in the context of healing the wounds of past atrocity is 'Let history inform us, not define us' (see Asseily, 2007). The public educational system should enable young people to develop an awareness of the history of slavery, and how it has shaped human societies. However, on both sides of the Atlantic, history education tends to be patchy and insufficient; possible improvements include changing the curriculum, expanding teachers' understanding of past atrocities and broadening history education resources (Shuster, 2018).

There has been some progress. One example is UNESCO's Route of Dialogue Project developing a multi-volume General History of Africa (GHA) written from African perspectives. GHA is now being used in African schools to teach how African societies have evolved and how African societies have contributed to humanity. This helps cultivate better awareness in African students of their histories and heritage. Another example is the Universities Studying Slavery (USS) Consortium consisting of over 40 colleges and universities from both sides of the Atlantic. Members share resources that describe the role of slavery and racism in their histories (University of Virginia, 2013). To be informed is only a start; education in general should cultivate human conscience and a sense of responsibility. If the history of slavery was well-taught for the development of awareness, there would be more chance of ending the cycles of violence.

## 2. Legislative Reforms

Although legal reforms in the United States, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, have ended some forms of discrimination, laws could do more than ending segregation; they could contribute to structural transformation.

Take the educational system as an example. National educational policies should prioritise creating an ethical environment in which students learn to relate to each

other ethically according to principles of mutual respect and the ethos of being a caring community (Gill and Thomson, 2020). Without such policies, programmes such as *No Child Left Behind* in the USA (now *Every Student Succeeds*), will continue to reinforce social divisions and the instrumentalisation of education.

Health laws are also significant in creating a socio-economic system that cares more for people. However, often health care laws focus on profit rather than human well-being. Under such laws, insurance companies may refuse to insure some people, pharmaceutical companies reward doctors who prescribe drugs for more profit-making, and the medical focus tends to be on remedial rather than preventative measures. Meanwhile millions do not have health coverage.

Land regulation is another key to structural change. However, although it is important to have legislative commitment to guarantee people of African descent access to land, especially in South America, consistency is needed to fulfil such commitments.<sup>18</sup>

Global charters and informal agreements might also help shift the system. There are several examples, such as the Charter of Compassion, the Peace Charter of Forgiveness and Reconciliation, and the Earth Charter. Such charters highlight humanity's global interdependence and mutual responsibility and seek pathways towards systemic transformation. Each charter articulates an ethical framework for a just and peaceful global society. These charters define guiding principles that can be adopted by groups, institutions, businesses, communities and governments.

## 3. Economic Institutions

Financial distribution is key to perpetuating institutionalised racism, and continuing the systemic wounding of slavery. For example, about 25% of all African

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*Financial distribution is key to perpetuating institutionalised racism.*

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Americans live in poverty across the continent. The current economic system structurally and systemically favours the rich and disfavours the poor. Given our history, this is bound to have profoundly racial implications.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, in 1988 in Brazil, as a result of significant grassroots pressure, the Parliament passed Article 68, guaranteeing the rights of *quilombos* (a small proportion of the Afro-Brazilian population) to land that they traditionally occupied. Whilst this was highly significant, in practice a lack of specific legislation meant that communities did not have land tenure security until 2003, when a Presidential Decree regularised Article 68. A similar law (Law 70) was passed in Colombia in 1997, recognising the rights of African descendants to land.



Take US educational funding distribution as an example. In many countries, public educational institutions in wealthy neighbourhoods tend to get much better funding than those in poor ones. As a result, schools in wealthy areas tend to attract better teachers and they have better facilities, both of which reinforce the cycles of poverty and the accompanying racism. In 2019, the US federal government spent just \$105 million for magnet schools that stress racial integration and inclusion of students from deprived backgrounds compared to the \$15.9 billion required for fully funding these schools. Although some universities allocate funds to support students from African American backgrounds, reparations must be situated within a financial system that ensures more fairness and equal opportunity.

The situations are repeated in other parts of the world. For instance, although there are some legislative commitments to guarantee people of African descent access to land in many countries in South America, such as in Colombia and Brazil, such commitments are not sufficient in addressing the legacies of injustice as a result of slave trade and slavery.

A more just economic system would systematically enable investments to flow into communities that need them rather than mainly benefiting the wealthy. Incentive systems, such as taxation, could be constructed to pump capital into neighbourhoods and local economies in ways that would intelligently help improve the lives of the less advantaged. Within the existing system, purpose-specific development funds for disadvantaged neighbourhoods would be a step in this direction.

#### 4. Public Education and Health Systems

In this review, we have highlighted dehumanisation at the root of racism and other social legacies of trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery. To transform this dehumanising and instrumentalising mentality requires a deep appreciation of the non-instrumental value of being a person (or of being conscious) and the intrinsic value of human well-being. Thus healing at systemic level will necessarily involve transforming education and healthcare as social systems and institutions.

To begin, education and healthcare must cease to be systems of production in themselves. With regard to education, this means that education must be centred on cultivating human consciousness so that children and young people reject any attempt to instrumentalise persons no matter the

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*Healing at systemic level will necessarily involve transforming education and healthcare.*

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colour of their skin, the ethnicity of their origin, or other social backgrounds. The aims of education cannot be simply imparting knowledge and training skills, not even to enable children and young people of African descent to assume well-paid jobs in society. Instead, education must aim at nurturing those qualities that make all children and young people appreciate our common human dignity. When children and young people learn to live out those human qualities, they are more likely to extend love and compassion to all and embody solidarity with those who are different. Furthermore, in nurturing such qualities, education can help cultivate citizens who are motivated to take responsibility for challenging structural inequality, and co-creating humane societies. The same humanising considerations must also apply to healthcare systems. For instance, healthcare ought to conceptualise human well-being in ways that are more complete, rather than merely treating humans as diseased bodies and enable all people to live life fully.

Structurally, both education and healthcare systems could encourage schools and hospitals to be humanising and caring institutions where the principles of the equal worth of all persons are actively pursued. Hence the design of schools and hospitals, their cultures and ethos, intentions and processes must be aligned with dignity, respect and generative relationships. Only in doing so, can education and healthcare systems escape the overall orientation of production, and move towards humanisation and genuine structural justice.

## DISCUSSION

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Although there are many structural reforms that could make societies less dehumanising and more just, and although without them, personal healing will only be partial, for the purpose of this review, it is best to limit Process Four to healing activities that are actionable in our communities. Gaining traction, these community initiatives and actions may then continue to influence popular understanding, opinion and interests, and thus subsequently provoke the shifts in political will required for structural change.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> It has been suggested that in North America, this is likely to be most effective where attempting to influence state-level policy and practice in the first instance.

Based on our interest in this review, we suggest that Process Four may involve inter-group dialogue through which participants become more aware of the systemic nature of racism along the following lines:

First, trans-Atlantic slavery has its roots in economic exploitation and this has engendered structural racism that keeps people of colour, especially those of African descent, in a disadvantaged situation. It is an inherent tendency of our economic system to treat people merely as commodities. This also means those who are vulnerable and at the society's margin will tend to be harmed by the system. Such points can help us comprehend better not only the history of the slave trade and of slavery, but also why racism is systemic in our society. This understanding is particularly meaningful in depersonalising the exploitative relations: it is *built* into the system that *the poor remain poor*.

Second, the current economic system encourages us to interact with each other mainly in ways that are framed by materialistic considerations. For instance, companies are mainly interested in the labour input of those who work for them and in customers as a source of revenue. This means that the human and relational richness of community life tends to be degraded to transaction-defined relationships between *individuals* who are otherwise indifferent to each other. Economic systems tend to individualise and instrumentalise people and place them into social spaces of mistrust and competition. In such a socio-economic context, relations between people from different social groups are likely to be antagonistic, especially when neighbourhoods are divided along the lines of wealth, colour and ethnicity. Whereas Process Three strives to create a space aimed at being free from such forces, Process Four would allow participants to see that the economic system makes such intimate social interaction scarce insofar as it defines public space in economic terms.

Third, recognition of the above two points constitutes part of the healing process: it is important to recognise that we are part of a system that breeds racism and that this is something that is not merely a matter of personal choice. From this point, community groups might be moved to political action such as suggesting reforms to local and regional councils, as well as national representatives.

## E. SOME CONCLUSIONS

On the whole, as the research team, we felt that the healing framework developed in the Conceptual Note (Gill and Thomson, 2019b) was robust and clear enough to structure the investigation of the Desk Review. Distinguishing the four processes has allowed us to see that each has a distinct dynamic and set of requirements,

We already discussed this in relation to component (d) in Process Three.

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*Healing is necessarily collective, cultural, and political at the same time*

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Fourth, as stressed by Judith Katz (1987), people of European descent tend to be less aware of the institutional and structural nature of contemporary racism than those of African descent. This indicates that they will need separate sessions to raise such an awareness. However, in order to not disturb the proposal that Process Four is a shared experience of already formed mixed groups, in order to facilitate the flow from Process Three to Four, we suggest that this consciousness raising be an integral part of Process Two for people of European descent.

Last, humanity is yet to become consciously aware that the wounding of trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery is effectively collective trauma, resulting in prevailing dehumanising socio-economic and political systems. Indeed, structural injustices can be understood as symptomatic of collective trauma. Structural violence as such has continued to hurt and inflict pain on global societies and communities beyond colour and ethnicity. This awareness may also prompt us to realise that healing is necessarily collective, cultural and political at the same time. Healing is necessarily collective because it involves everyone's taking the responsibility for seeking acknowledgement of dehumanisation, and actively connecting with self and others, and for restoring and nurturing well-being for one and all. Healing is necessarily cultural because it requires our engaging with our human or spiritual identity beyond the confines of colour, ethnicity, gender, wound and other forms of self-identification that can potentially separate groups as us-versus-them. Healing is necessarily political because it encompasses a systemic transformation to eradicate all institutional conditions that make dehumanisation possible. More importantly, it depends on humanity to unite in refusing to partake in structural violence as the basis of our dignity.

and together they support and strengthen the overall healing process.

Whilst many rich examples of practice have been identified, the Desk Review has not been able to uniformly identify details about specific healing practices

for each part of the four processes. Beyond descriptions, it is not always clear how the identified approaches work in practice and therefore, it is not always obvious what their specific pitfalls and strengths are.

In general, we conclude that healing approaches and practices to support the four processes are not always readily available. For instance, there is more detail readily accessible on the various components of Process Three, but less on those of Process Two. In terms of Process Four, directed at systemic transformation, there are hardly any examples to draw upon.

Within each process, healing approaches and practices are not equally distributed amongst the different components. For instance, this is true of Process Two, and especially with regard to (c) and (d) respectively pertaining to dignity and wholeness. We take these two dimensions to be very important for healing the wounds of slavery, and therefore this will need to be addressed in the next step of the project.

Furthermore, it is clear that Process Two needs to be carried out separately for people of African descent and for those of European descent. More work is needed on how the two distinct processes should be designed, and by whom. This is especially true given that neither of the two groups are uniform. For instance, among the population of European descent, there are some people who would already resonate with the general aims and assumptions of the UNESCO project, but there are others who would initially be antipathetic to these assumptions, and others still who would be totally indifferent. This suggests that different approaches and modules would be necessary as part of the portfolio of activities and exercises that a UNESCO programme would offer. Analogous points might be made about different African American groups, including those differentiated by virtue of gender, age, ethnicity, and so forth.

This need for a diverse portfolio is enhanced by the significant cultural and historical differences between the Caribbean and North, Central and South America contexts, and the specific types of historical wounding and the legacies that each have entailed. However, we found very little practical literature to help with this comparative

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*Humanity must unite, take responsibility, and engage proactively in dialogue in reimagining a global system that is sensitive to the well-being of all.*

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approach, and in particular very little evidence of healing efforts in African sending countries. This constitutes a third gap that needs to be addressed in the next step of the project. One thing that is clear is that where there can be collaboration and connection across national borders, there will be mutual acknowledgement of a shared history and commitment to moving beyond that history towards a mutually flourishing future. Such mutual acknowledgement and shared commitment would energise and expand healing efforts throughout those countries that had played a part in slave trade and slavery.

Finally, this Review has noted the burgeoning programmes of Processes Three (and to some extent, of Process Two) are largely owing to grassroots movements, NGOs and philanthropies. To design programmes for all four processes, we can see that each process must be co-developed involving peoples and voices of African American communities, those of European descent, and others, rather than merely initiated by those in power, so that they neither sustain nor reflect existing power relations.

Clearly, these different dimensions of healing are deeply intertwined. Whilst certain actors and agents are needed to facilitate the diverse processes of and approaches to healing, it is paramount that everyone involved recognises these as shared trauma and acknowledges the imperative of collective healing. It will never be enough, or possible, for individual persons, groups, communities, organisations, or even nations to seek healing in isolation. Instead, it requires humanity to unite, to take responsibility, and to engage proactively in dialogue in reimagining a global system that is caring, just, relationally enriching, and sensitive to the well-being of all.



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*'Much of the international world, perhaps most conspicuously "white America", seems to be paralysed psychologically in its capacity to confront the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in an open and honest way...*

*'Systemic transformation must be situated in realistic but intentional spaces for deep dialogue that aims to engage people from all backgrounds in discussions about opportunities for healing, challenging institutional racism and structural equality.'*

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# RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAYS FORWARD



Drawing on the findings from this review, in this section we make some specific recommendations for each process in our proposed healing framework. We then propose some next steps for the UNESCO Healing the Wounds of Slave Trade and Slavery programme, including developing a Handbook for Healing, and piloting experiential collective healing workshops in five key sites, including in North and South America and the Caribbean.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROCESS ONE

As we have seen, Process One aims to address dehumanisation, and good practice as regards Process One tends to include public acknowledgement and apologies from the leaders of national governments, and from relevant organisations and groups, for their part in dehumanising acts. However, this review suggests that such apologies need at least four accompaniments:

First, they require a recognition from the general public that such acknowledgement and apologies are needed, otherwise they fall on deaf ears. This may require public education initiatives (see below). Second, acknowledgement and apologies must be recognised by the public as genuine expressions of atonement; they must not be merely politically or economically motivated. Third, acknowledgement and apologies need to be explicitly accompanied by commitments to reparations, social action and systemic transformation that end ongoing wounding. Fourth, public apologies should be accompanied by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission process that charts the historical narratives, links present ongoing wounding (e.g. in the form of racist discourses, acts and structures) to historic slavery, and acknowledges the lived realities of those being dehumanised.

This review suggests that any such undertaking must have funding and political and public support to ensure it can meet its aims. Otherwise, it can be perceived as a sham and perpetuate the status quo. Furthermore, for such apologies and accompanying processes to be effective there would ideally be a commitment to honesty, transparency and structural change on the part of the whole community, including those in power, as we saw in the exemplary case of Georgetown University. Other examples from this review suggest that where international leadership engages in collaborative efforts towards building shared narratives and offering apologies alongside one another this may provide a powerful step towards reconciliation and healing.

As shown in our recommendations for Process Two, this review suggests that there also need to be programmes and initiatives that support individuals and local communities to connect to the human aspects of their history and to understand how their respective ancestries and current situations are directly linked. Much of the international world, perhaps most conspicuously ‘white America’,

*Any such undertaking must have funding and political and public support to ensure it can meet its aims.*

seems to be paralysed psychologically in its capacity to confront the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in an open and honest way. This is a major impediment to any serious attempts to reckon with the past in the ways that Germany or New Zealand have done. There seems to be little understanding that the trans-Atlantic slave trade constitutes possibly the worst genocide in human history. Public education initiatives and programmes such as the Smithsonian NMAAHC, Coming to the Table and Yole!Africa may support the process of overturning deeply-engrained cultural ignorance and its attendant emotions, thus making way for the shift in public opinion needed to make public apologies and atonement welcome.

Finally, the inspiring approach of Germany’s ‘Never Again’, required the explicit recognition and rejection of what it looks like to treat the other as less than human, and the shift towards an openness to the lived reality of the other. Programmes are required during which people from all backgrounds can come together and discuss and reflect on what it is like to be on both sides of dehumanising acts and to understand better the act itself.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROCESS TWO

Process Two is directed at the (traumatic and harmful) effects of being dehumanised. This Review suggests that a core element to healing in Process Two is the

prioritisation of opportunities for remembrance and commemoration of the dehumanising histories. Meaningful examples tend to engage their audiences in



further debate or action, including those which provoke further acts of remembering or commemorating. This is often done successfully through making explicit links between the traumas of the past and the ongoing dehumanisation in the present day. Memorials that connect audiences with the individual human experience of past atrocities, for example through slave narratives and photographs, or individual naming as in the case of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, are often effective in evoking empathy and compassion, and a deeper connection with the history.

In the context of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery, where the historical narratives and truths have been systematically silenced, part of healing in Process Two can take the form of breaking such silence. This emphasises the importance of encouraging more and more diverse oral history projects, such as the Getting Word Project. Exemplary projects would make connections between the oral histories of those on both sides of the power struggle, as well as on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, stories of people's experiences within the African countries who have lost families and relatives to slave trade, and the stories of diasporas across the continents. These projects can play a core part in de-silencing history, honouring this part of history with respect, and establishing its appropriate place in national and trans-national histories.

Likewise film, theatre, novels, TV, exhibitions and other creative arts that engage the public emotionally and empathetically with the history of dehumanisation and its ongoing legacies can play a key role in changing how people think and engage with both the past and contemporary issues. Books written by celebrated authors of African descent, such as those by Frederick Douglass, Toni Morrison, W.E.B. Dubois, and others, would be significant in de-silencing the past, and give voices to the otherwise voiceless, and help us remember the unremembered. The provision of funding for creative projects, especially funding that links initiatives and projects internationally, as in the case of the 'Antislavery Knowledge Network', would facilitate their proliferation, as would the support of large public media organisations, such as PBS in the US and the BBC in the UK, and shared programming across countries.

All such projects should be engaged in with care and caution. Whilst the silence needs to be broken, doing so can pose the risk of re-traumatisation. This emphasises the need for carefully facilitated processes that help individuals and communities to make sense of trauma.

This Review has emphasised the need for wounded individuals to understand how they have been and are being affected by the historic and ongoing wounding that are the legacies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and ultimately to distance themselves from these traumas.

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*Whilst the silence needs to be broken, doing so can pose the risk of re-traumatisation.*

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In particular, it emphasises that both descendants of the enslaved and the enslavers experience trauma as part of dehumanising acts. It suggests that given the significant differences in the nature of these wounds, it will tend to make more sense for this aspect of Process Two to be engaged with through separate programmes, designed with the particular needs of each group in mind.

Programmes and initiatives targeting descendants of enslaved people in the United States, for example, are likely to reflect and address the symptoms and causes of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, as identified by DeGruy. Those targeting so-called 'white guilt' are likely to have a different focus, for example on demystification, humility, overcoming fear and numbness, and shifting from guilt to grief. Common to all such programmes and initiatives, however, will be the need for safe, open, honest, non-judgemental spaces, where participants feel they can be themselves and take risks.

Furthermore, this Review points out that having recognised one's trauma as separate from oneself, one can become more able to reconnect with one's human dignity. In the case of the African diaspora, where cultural wounding has left individuals and communities without a sense of dignified identity, initiatives such as public national and international celebrations and community movements that celebrate African culture may play a role in supporting individuals and communities to reconnect with dignity and a sense of wholeness. Similarly, engagement with spiritual and traditional practices and opportunities, such as traditional dance and music, may also contribute to such healing. Opportunities for individuals to work on an individual level to connect to their own value as persons are invaluable here; this may include activities which enable opportunities for self-compassion and artistic experience.

Many of the processes described above involve a deeper personal recognition of the effects of the trauma caused by the legacies of slave trade and slavery, and as such they may tend to accentuate and strengthen racial identities and labelling. In this sense, they may seem to pull in the opposite direction from Process Three, which moves towards transcending the binaries in identity, such as race-based, African American vs non-African American, or victim vs aggressor, towards a recognition of shared humanity. Reconnection with human dignity and a sense of wholeness can help prepare for the relational dynamics of Process Three.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROCESS THREE AND PROCESS FOUR

This Review suggests that Process Three should provide the opportunity for people of different groups to experience each other as human beings by bringing them closer and by sharing the lived experience of each other in an intimate manner.

Therefore, the spaces for Process Three need to be safe, inclusive, confidential and respectful. These need to be spaces in which people will listen empathetically to each other without judgment and in which people feel free to be open and honest. The direction of Process Three is towards transcending binary oppositional identities of the 'us versus them'. Any attempt to pre-empt the result of such a process by defining an end-goal such as reconciliation and forgiveness would constitute an imposition. Nevertheless, the intended direction of Process Three needs to be clear: towards experiences that touch the humanity we share and towards building an embracing experiential awareness of we-ness.

Programmes and initiatives for Process Three thus tend to involve those that aim at enabling individuals and communities to connect to their shared humanity, including common struggle and plight. Some such initiatives may focus on community building, or public informal and non-formal education. Others may focus on creating spaces and opportunities conducive to reconciliation and forgiveness. Practices include those that bring together individuals whose histories are linked in some way and guide the participants through a process of mutual understanding.

Activities that support Process Three may also feature those that engage with processes of deep sharing through, for example, self-narration, story-telling, and other sharing circles. Equally, there may be group-based exercises including drama, roleplay, re-enactment of events, somatic movement and expressive arts. Similarly, there are experiences from a *spiritual* perspective involving, for instance, meditation, visualisation, contemplation, and ritualistic experiences. When linked by themes through deep dialogue, as well as shared grief and vulnerability, exemplary programmes can bring participants closer to a sense of their common humanity.

This Review suggests that for individuals and communities to heal from and move beyond the violent and dehumanising history and legacies of the slave trade, there is a need for explicit engagement with the

relational challenges faced, and with how these could be transformed. Existing case studies illustrate that practices of group-based deep sharing and deep dialogue are especially meaningful in reconnecting people in their common humanity. As such programmes further build trust and affirm a feeling of security and shared destiny, they may pave the way for transformation within wider communities.

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*Systemic transformation should be situated in realistic but intentional spaces for deep dialogue.*

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Process Three may thus fruitfully take other less obvious forms, for example through community activities, such as community arts or sports projects, charitable events, festivals, and so forth, that intentionally bring together groups across racial, gender and other social divides in communities. Collective actions through engaging in communal activities contribute to breaking down barriers and challenging the status quo. In this regard, this Review suggests that the most effective, enduring and meaningful initiatives will be those that work at all levels in a community, from small groups to local governance. Where a common relational vision becomes shared across political and historical divides, as in the exemplary case of HIC in Richmond, then individuals and communities can begin to recapture a future of hope beyond dehumanising history. As mutual trust grows, so too do opportunities for fruitful co-action, which in turn strengthens trust, and enriches generative relationships.

This last point marks a natural transition into Process Four. If through Process Three, groups have attained care for and trust in each other, if they have built mutual understanding and respect, then in preparation for any community co-action, they might undertake the kinds of dialogue necessary for Process Four. This would construct a recognition of the structural and institutional features of society that promote racism.

Above all, Process Four requires a collective awakening to the recognition of our current systems of production which have been normalised to such an extent that many individuals and institutions are willing participants in a consciousness of productivity and instrumentalisation.

Thus this Review recommends that systemic transformation be situated in realistic but intentional spaces for deep dialogue that aims to engage people from all backgrounds in discussions about opportunities for healing, challenging institutional racism, and structural equality.

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*Spaces need to be safe, inclusive, confidential and respectful.*

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## WAYS FORWARD

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In view of the above, we envisage that the UNESCO Slave Route Project would focus on five steps:

The first is to seek general consultation with scholars and practitioners on the design of a set of experiential workshops that could be implemented in different communities and contexts within the general framework outlined in this Desk Review.

The second is to draw on the conclusions of the consultation and the relevant recommendations to develop a Handbook for Healing that includes activities and guidelines for facilitators for these group-based experiential healing workshops. We would suggest the development of a flexible portfolio or set of facilitation guidelines, some components or modules of which would be appropriate for some contexts, and others better for other contexts. It would also consist of further resources for local facilitators, indicating the strengths, weaknesses and pitfalls of each module.

The third is to identify communities to pre-pilot the proposed workshop activities and to evaluate their effectiveness. In doing so, the Handbook for Healing will be further strengthened and activities and resources further developed. The pre-pilot would contain a review of training modules for local facilitators so that the proposed healing approaches and methodologies can be more readily implemented in the different regions.

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*Workshops should be rooted in communities and make links with existing programmes, initiatives and collaborations.*

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The fourth is to identify communities in the Americas within the UNESCO's International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICISC) network that are willing to collaborate in providing spaces for the proposed Healing Programme. The focus at this phase would be to offer training to facilitators who would be able to work within relevant communities. Where possible these workshops should be rooted in communities and make links with existing programmes, initiatives and collaborations.

The last step involves piloting in five key sites, including in the United States, the Caribbean, and South America. The pilot workshops will collect learnings and evidence in terms of the effects on collective healing in the communities.

Together, these five steps constitute a rigorous and systematic process of developing engaging programmes for healing the wounds of trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery.



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The UNESCO Slave Route Project was established in 1994 to understand the causes and legacies of slavery across the globe, and to contribute to a culture of peace. It focuses on promoting inclusion, pluralism, dialogue and the cultivation of global citizenship. At its core is the recognition of the need for collective healing to address the wounds of trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery.

This report brings together diverse voices from thinkers, researchers and practitioners in the field of collective healing. It suggests that any attempts to meet the world's contemporary healing needs must consider the historic dehumanising acts and attendant wounds, but also contemporary racism and the structural violence of our global economic system. Only by combining political and communal processes of collective healing can we contribute towards rebuilding caring, humanising and just systems.

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