**HERITAGE, BOUNDARIES AND SHARING: HOW TO RE-IMAGINE**

**SOUTH AFRICA?**

**INTRODUCTION**

We are fortunate to live in one of the few countries in the world that has been given the opportunity to make a fresh start. Not once, but many times over the last four centuries. We are once more being given another opportunity to re-imagine and re-build our country after 22 years of our democracy.

We have much to celebrate. Our 1994 political settlement has laid the foundations of our constitutional democracy. Many of the vital institutions underpinning our democracy are firmly in place. Many have stood the test of time as solid pillars. We also have a strong private sector that continues to generate wealth under tough conditions.

Vibrant civil society organizations have also played their role as active participants in strengthening our democracy. Their watchdog roles enhance accountability of those in positions of leadership in both the public and private sectors.

I feel privileged to be included in your family gathering as your guest. I am mindful of the need for respectful engagement in the space of family conversations about matters of heritage. Nonetheless I will take advantage of your kind invitation to me as a member of your larger family of citizens of this beloved country to share my thoughts on how we might re-imagine what re-building a shared heritage might look like.

One of the striking features of the Stellenbosch Valley is the richness of its heritage. The association of Stellenbosch with Simon Van der Stel, a son of a Dutchman and a woman of Indian descent, is a powerful symbolism of the richness of the diversity of the heritage of this area. Stellenbosch is also blessed with unmatched beauty of its landscapes – mountains and valleys covered with natural fynbos and vineyards.

Each one of the wine estates in this valley embodies the finest antique furniture collections and architecture. World-class wines and some of the most exquisite cuisines are produced, consumed and exported from here. Technology and innovation characterise not only the great University of Stellenbosch, but infuse a silicone valley culture in businesses as well. There is healthy competition amongst investors in new innovative technology enterprises that are reshaping the valley, our country and our world.

The entire valley is witness to a long history of encounters between indigenous people and European settlers. The stories of those encounters should provide a wealth of wisdom for present and future generations. **But many stories remain untold.**

What questions do we – as stakeholders of the Stellenbosch Valley – have to pose, and answer in order to create a future we can all fully share in?

In this Lecture I would like to explore the following themes:

* How do we negotiate a Shared Heritage across Boundaries?
* How does Heritage as Memory and Remembering inform the reimagining of our shared future?
* What could a Re-imagined Future of Stellenbosch Valley and South Africa look like?

**Negotiating Boundaries and Sharing Heritage?**

Heritage is inherently a boundary issue – emphasising physical and symbolic distinctions. We are shaped by the heritage we embody. Heritage defines insiders and outsiders. We take pride in what makes us unique as inheritors of each particular strand of heritage. Even within a circle of insiders of a particular heritage there is often conflict about who is entitled to what. Sibling rivalry is an ancient phenomenon that has shaped history from biblical times and continues to shape social relationships today.

How then could one talk of shared heritage across boundaries in a society such as ours that is deeply etched by racism, ethnic divides, language barriers, sexism and class divides? How does one face up to the painful truths about boundaries that have shifted over time to include some, whilst excluding others?

What about new entrants into previously bounded spaces? Who defines what rules of engagement apply under such circumstances? Is it the prerogative of the insiders to always set the rules of engagement for newcomers? Or is there space for renegotiation of the rules of engagement to enable the emergence of inclusive shared approaches?

In the context of Stellenbosch, how does the heritage of this beautiful valley get redefined and reshaped by the present generations of inhabitants in preparation for a new imagined future?

South Africans often speak about unity in diversity. What does this actually mean? Does it mean that each of us live our parallel lives meeting only occasionally as the opportunity presents itself? Or does it mean that we sit together to talk about how we traverse the diverse spaces that make us unique whilst becoming more conscious of the fundamental sacred unity of our humanity?

We have the opportunity to pause and ask ourselves whether we are trapped in different worlds – physical and material realities that might impose limits on our imagination and our dreams? What might we create if we learnt to listen across, see across, reach across and connect across boundaries?

Being on the mountaintop is often celebrated as the height of achievement of human effort. But human life is lived in the valleys and not on mountaintops. It is in the valleys of our lives where deep conversations are possible. Telling our stories occurs in the valleys where we can be more relaxed, where we can sit around a fire or dinner table.

Let me share with you one story from this valley:

*Pinkie Yolisa, a teacher at Ikhaya Primary School in Kayamandi, was celebrated by eNCA over the last few weeks showcasing her heroic efforts to introduce girls at her school to gymnastics. The girls had not been participating in any sports until 2004.*

*An invitation to Yolisa by the coach of Van der Stel Gymnastic Club to attend the national championships being hosted there opened her eyes to the possibilities of training her own pupils in the sport. The barriers of distance to the Club from Kayamandi challenged Yolisa to improvise.*

*She decided to train her pupils in the bare quad of the school and on the streets due to lack of adequate gymnastic facilities in the Kayamandi community. There is neither a hall nor any space suitable for practice. She urges her pupils to improvise and push themselves despite the odds.*

*Ikhaya is the only primary school in the township, which has a population of over 20,000. The township has a mixture of housing, including corrugated tin shacks, but these are slowly being removed and replaced by low-income housing.*

*Textbooks are very scarce and have to be photocopied for use by students. Ikhaya is the only school in Stellenbosch without computers for the use of students and the television donated by Opportunity Education is its first.*

*None of these challenges deterred Yolisa. Since 2010, she has seen two of her top gymnasts compete in three national championships. For many of the participants gymnastics has opened the door to a whole new world of success.*

*The happy faces of the girls speak volumes. They love being stretched physically, emotionally and intellectually. The elegance of their gazelle-like bodies on the dusty streets moving to the music from a scratchy CD player on a chair, pay tribute to triumph of the human spirit over adversity. One of the girls said with a beaming face: “At the beginning I thought my body would break, but it has become used to being pushed and it feels great!”*

Who owns the heritage that is being shaped here at Ikhaya Primary School? Is it only the school and its dedicated teachers? Is it the Kayamandi Community as a whole? Is it the Municipality of Stellenbosch that is responsible for local governance and services? What about the University that could become home to the graduates of Ikaya as they triumph over their challenging environment to want to advance their careers as talented gymnasts and dancers?

Celebrating the successes of the diverse heritages within this valley could become much deeper if you were to choose to pause and interrogate your heritage across the current boundaries that divide the people of this valley. How does one build unity in diversity to embrace Kayamandi, Pniel, Cloetesville and Stellenbosch university town?

It may be an interesting exercise to create a space for young people from this valley to spend a day together to share what they love most about Stellenbosch. They could also explore what else they might want to see being done to enrich their valley further. It would also great to hear what each one of them would commit to do differently to achieve whatever shared vision emerges from such an exploration.

Such an exploration would enable young people to share not only physical spaces, but also for them to become curators of their own living heritage by listening intently and making meaning – in real time – of the different interpretations of the “same” shared reality. Once this is done the next step would naturally emerge – to re-imagine shared futures they can believe in as President Obama powerfully proclaimed in his own context.

**How Does Heritage as Memory and Remembering Enrich our Re-imagined Futures?**

Heritage is often regarded as inherently about the past and the present we inhabit. But heritage is about past, present and future. It is about re-interpreting one’s frame of reference to re-imagine and re-invent the future. Heritage is a way of bringing the past back to life to shape the future by employing stories to cut across boundaries, enacting new symbols, meanings, interpretations, perspectives and dialogues in the present. These experiences need to appeal to emotions, heart and the universal need for spiritual fulfilment.

David Whyte, a marine biologist and a poet, reminds us of the critical role of memory in our lives. *“We actually inhabit memory as a living threshold, as a place of choice and volition and imagination, a crossroads where our future diverges according to how we interpret, or perhaps more accurately, how we live the story we have inherited.”[[1]](#footnote-1)* Memories cannot be erased. They are embedded in our body, mind and spirit.

Heritage is about celebrating those memories. But heritage is also a living threshold as a place of *“choice, volition and imagination.”* We need to ask ourselves today as we stand at this living threshold what choices we are prepared to make about the future of this valley and of our country. How are we to live by the stories we have individually and collectively inherited whilst re-imagining and re-inventing a future we can be proud to bequeath to our children?

Recent repeated tensions, stresses and conflicts that are erupting around the country are challenging us to come down from the mountaintop of 1994 where our political settlement was forged. We need to sit down in the valley around a fire, symbolic or real, to tell each other the stories by which we have lived in the past including over the last 22 years.

Those stories are likely to be stories of success, triumph and hope. They are also likely to contain fragments of humiliation, failure, fear, anger and despair in the lives of many of us. Some of the stories would be inspirational and stretch us to re-imagine futures we may have thought impossible.

In 1994 we dreamt ourselves into a space where the impossible became possible. Those negotiating our political settlement dared to imagine a shared future without precedence in our country. They were able to imagine the unimaginable.

Is it not time to sit down together again to dare to acknowledge to one another that the dream of 1994 is fading into the darkness of our despair? Like all heritage, the 1994 dream is being contested, and in some spaces denounced as a sell out. Mandela’s generation is accused by some of having let white people get away with murder – symbolic and actual.

The contestation of the 1994 dream stems from our failure to acknowledge that our diverse heritage was purchased at a heavy cost. That incalculable cost of centuries of pain, humiliation and impoverishment requires an Emotional Settlement Deal to complement and reinforce our celebrated Political Settlement.

Emotional settlement is about acknowledging the wounds inflicted by a system that violated God’s creation plan of making us all in his image. Our embodiment of God’s image eternally connects us as his creatures. Abuses of human rights under colonial conquest, legalized racism including slavery and other economic exploitation have wounded both black and white people. Abuses fractured the eternal connections between us. We carry those scars in our bodies, our minds and souls as toxic cargo.

*Ubuntu*, the African philosophical foundation of social relationships, spells out what is at stake in our society with the persistent fracture of our connectedness. Michael Onyebuchi Eze, a Zimbabwean academic based at Cambridge University, refers to Ubuntu thus:  *“ ’A person is a person through other people’ strikes an affirmation of one’s humanity through recognition of an ‘other’ in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative inter-subjective formation in which the ‘other’ becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity.*

*This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not imbedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation.*

*And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The ‘I am’ is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic of self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance.[[2]](#footnote-2) ”*

The values embedded in this understanding of Ubuntu are profound. Our better understanding of this philosophical grounding would enrich our approach to our identity as individuals, our relationships to other individuals, our family, our communities, the wider society and the world we live in.

Proceeding from the notion that humanity is a quality we owe to each other imposes an inescapable ethical and moral code on our social relationships. It is not an option whether I respect your human dignity, but it is an obligation and condition of my being a self- respecting human.

Our failure to sit together and acknowledge to one another the wounds and pains of our divided past is undermining our shared humanity. The future we aspire to is imprisoned by our unacknowledged past. Our inability to affirm our humanity through recognition of the ‘other’ in their uniqueness and differences makes creating a shared human community difficult.

South Africans need to acknowledge that we are a wounded people. The evidence is overwhelming. The levels of poverty, inequality, unemployment, crime and violence in both the public and private intimate spheres are alarming.

Joy DeGruy, an African American a clinical psychologist and social worker, shares experiences of her country that could be immensely helpful to us as we seek our own healing. She draws attention to the phenomenon of vacant self-esteem amongst African American people after years of humiliation. Men seem to bear the brunt of vacant self-esteem.

She writes that[[3]](#footnote-3): *“Perhaps when we do not have enough self-esteem the idea of manhood is all we have left. Perhaps when for centuries we have not been allowed to be ‘men’ our concept of manhood has yet to mature.*

*Perhaps our sense of who we are and what we are leads us to perceive any minor slight as an assault on our very core. And when our core is in danger we respond in anger, rage and sometimes violence. And this behaviour often results in behaviours that undermine much of what we are working to accomplish.”*

Does this sound familiar? Just look around our campuses, schools, working and living spaces to see how rage spills over into self-sabotage activities: violence in #Rhodesmustfall movement; school burnings in Limpopo; violence at Wits, UJ and UKZN and Fort Hare campuses.

Unfortunately whiteness is still used as a standard by inappropriately named Model C schools as we witnessed recently. The corporate sector’s continuing white male dominance also speaks to the wounds that need urgent healing. The brutality of domestic violence and abuse of children both black and white, are also symptoms of our vacant self-esteem problems.

If we are to heal and become healthy we will need to build on our strengths. This Valley has more than its fair share of strengths. Leveraging those collective strengths would set you on a path into a shared future of mutual healing and wellbeing. Your healing and wellbeing would model what is possible for our society.

**What Could a Re-imagined and Rebuilt Stellenbosch Look Like?**

Again Joy DeGruy’s wisdom might help us:

*“Telling our stories can be redemptive. Telling our stories can free us. Story telling is an important part of our education; it strengthens us and builds resilience. It helps us put things in the proper perspective.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

I would like to encourage you as residents of Stellenbosch Valley with your rich heritage to consider leading the charge on initiating Emotional Settlement conversations to heal our nation.

Imagine if you chose Pniel as the place for these healing conversations. Pniel is a symbolic place. It was founded in 1843 in this valley as the sanctuary for freed slaves who had been left to roam with no place of abode after their legal emancipation in 1838.

The village is situated at the bosom of Simonsberg Mountain that watches over a history of slavery, but also of a people who struggled for freedom through hard work, faith and education.

Residents of this village whilst engaged with life outside Pniel, remain rooted in this historic place bequeathed to them by their slave ancestors. Freedom from slavery and later apartheid has not moved them to stray away from the safety of their sanctuary.

Pniel Village, by hosting healing conversations of the Valley’s residents across boundaries, could then live up to its name as the place of encounter between Jacob and the Angel of God – *“Here I have seen God face to the face and my life is preserved.”* Here the Valley people could then encounter one another anew as creatures of the God in whose image they have been created.

Pniel would then become the birthplace of healing stories of those involved: village people, farmers, workers, township residents, the Stellenbosch municipality, the University community (students, academics, Council members, workers) and the business community in the valley. Such conversations would need to be facilitated by experts to create safe enough spaces.

The past would need to be laid bare to free the present and the future from its grip. Emotional settlement under the rubric of *Ubuntu* would enable wrong doing to be acknowledged, forgiveness to be sought and given, so a new beginning can emerge.

Forgiveness is guaranteed within the Ubuntu framework, because both the wrongdoer and the wronged person benefit from the reconnection that follows forgiveness. They can then see themselves in each other as people on a shared healing journey.

The Valley has enough resources to establish a strong foundation for re-imagining a shared future that each would contribute to building together. Pniel would contribute spiritual resources. The University would provide the intellectual resources. Farmers would bring in the models of re-imagined farms such as Delta Solms, customized for the Valley. The municipality would need to bring its governance resources to make places such as Kayamandi and Cloetesville well resourced suburbs of the town sharing its rich cultural spaces.

South Africa would benefit immensely from a model emotional settlement process. This model would pave the way to the essential socio-economic restructuring our society needs so desperately. Imagine the talents that would be unleashed through such a healing process. Imagine the impact on families when parents are healed and capable of being more loving and caring.

Imagine how exciting teaching and learning would become with the use of emerging stories as tools for intellectual and spiritual engagement. Imagine how much more productive our farms, businesses and other workspaces would become when citizens trust one another and are inspired by a new shared vision of a prosperous just democracy.

**Conclusion**

I can do no more than to encourage you to dare to venture into the space of re-imagining your valley. Such re-imagining would lead you to find the courage to engage in emotional settlement conversations about your shared heritage and heal its wounds.

You have all the resources you need to undertake this journey of healing. The question that only **you** can answer is: **Do you have the will to do this emotional settlement work?**

Mamphela Ramphele

Active Citizen

15/9/2016

1. Whyte, D., Consolations, 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Eze, M.O. Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa, pp190-191 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. DeGruy, Joy, Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome – America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing; Uptone, 2005, USA [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. DeGruy, Joy, Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)