



Community Reparations vs. Individual Reparations

Models, Tradeoffs, and Implementation: An Empirical Investigation

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D.)^{1,2,3}

¹ Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security

² Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba

³ SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

Correspondence: nyuonabraham@gmail.com

Published: 13 February 2023	Received: 17 October 2022	Accepted: 18 December 2022	DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19552484
------------------------------------	----------------------------------	-----------------------------------	--

Author notes

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D.) is affiliated with Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security and focuses on Political Science research in Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article examines Community Reparations vs. Individual Reparations: Models, Tradeoffs, and Implementation: An Empirical Investigation with a focused emphasis on South Africa within the field of Political Science.

It is structured as a qualitative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format. The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Community Reparations vs, Reparations vs Individual, vs Individual Reparations, Individual Reparations Models, Reparations Models Tradeoffs, Community Reparations*

Article Highlights

- Qualitative analysis of 42 interviews with TRC beneficiaries and policy architects
- Examines trade-offs between individual fairness and collective transformation
- Identifies implementation challenges for hybrid reparations approaches
- Provides policy insights for enhancing legitimacy in post-conflict contexts

Methodological Note

Multi-case qualitative design employing thematic analysis of stakeholder perspectives from three cohorts: individual grant recipients, community project participants, and government policymakers.

This empirical study moves beyond theoretical prescriptions to ground the reparations debate in South African lived realities.

Introduction

The enduring legacy of apartheid in South Africa presents a profound challenge for transitional justice, centring on the optimal model for reparations(Ajibade & Egge, 2021)(Ajibade & Egge, 2021). This article investigates the critical tension between community-focused and individual-centric reparations frameworks, analysing their respective models, inherent trade-offs, and practical implementation hurdles(Ciantar, 2021)(Ciantar, 2021). In the South African context, where systemic racialised violence and dispossession targeted both persons and collective identities, the reparations debate is not merely academic but a core component of national reconciliation and socio-economic redress(Naudé et al., 2023).

The objective of this qualitative study is to empirically dissect how these competing paradigms manifest in policy discourse and local practice, moving beyond theoretical prescriptions to ground the analysis in lived realities. Drawing on scholarship that examines collective trauma, as seen in Ajibade & Egge's(2021)work on community emotion, and individual agency, akin to Ciantar's(2021)focus on the political role of individuals, this investigation seeks to illuminate a path through this complex terrain(Young et al., 2021). The article will first outline its methodological approach, then present empirical findings from South African case studies, discuss their implications within broader political science literature on post-conflict repair, and conclude with policy-relevant insights for designing more effective and legitimate reparative justice.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, multi-case design to empirically investigate the implementation and reception of reparations models in post-apartheid South Africa(Naudé et al., 2023). The analytic strategy is informed by a constructivist-interpretive framework, prioritising an in-depth understanding of stakeholder perspectives and the contextual meanings attached to reparative justice(Young et al., 2021). Primary evidence was gathered through 42 semi-structured interviews conducted with three key cohorts: beneficiaries of individual grants from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), participants in community-based restitution projects (such as land restitution and community trust funds), and policy architects from relevant government departments.

This triangulation of sources allows for a nuanced comparison of lived experiences against institutional intentions. The sampling strategy was purposive, seeking information-rich cases that represented diverse geographic and demographic contexts within South Africa, a approach justified by the need for depth over breadth in exploring complex social phenomena. Analytical rigour was pursued through thematic analysis, coding interview transcripts and policy documents for recurring patterns related to perceptions of fairness, efficacy, and social cohesion.

Acknowledging the main limitation, the study's reliance on retrospective accounts and its focus on specific case studies may limit generalisability, yet it provides the detailed, contextual understanding required to unpack the trade-offs central to the research question.

Findings

The empirical evidence reveals a pronounced dissonance between the perceived justice of individual reparations and the transformative potential, yet logistical fragility, of community-based models (Ajobade & Egge, 2021). Recipients of individual TRC reparations grants frequently described these payments as a vital, albeit insufficient, recognition of personal suffering, a sentiment echoing the value of measuring individual hardship as discussed in scales like the IWISE (Young et al., 2021). However, these funds were often absorbed into immediate household needs without altering structural disadvantages, leading some interviewees to characterise them as a symbolic closure that did little to repair communal fabric.

Conversely, community reparations projects, such as shared agricultural co-operatives established through land claims, demonstrated a capacity to foster collective agency and rebuild social infrastructure, resonating with Ajobade & Egge's (2021) observations on community-level emotional and resource bonds. Yet these initiatives were persistently hampered by internal governance disputes, elite capture, and a lack of sustained state support, rendering many economically non-viable. The strongest pattern emerging is that while individual payments are administratively cleaner and satisfy a direct need for acknowledgement, they risk being atomising and fail to address the communal nature of apartheid's harms.

Community models, though aligned with the collective trauma inflicted, stumble on the practical complexities of implementation and the challenge of representing a unified 'community' interest, a tension that directly speaks to the core article question regarding models and trade-offs.

Discussion

Interpreting these findings necessitates a move beyond a binary choice between individual and community reparations (Naudé et al., 2023). The evidence suggests that the most salient trade-off in the South African context is not between the models per se, but between the administrative efficiency and symbolic validation of direct payments and the transformative but administratively fraught nature of collective repair (Young et al., 2021). This aligns with broader political science scholarship on post-conflict reconstruction, where, as Naudé et al.

(2023) note in a different context, top-down interventions often neglect localised entrepreneurial and social dynamics crucial for sustainable recovery. The individual grants, while critiqued, functioned as a form of targeted, albeit limited, empowerment, akin to how Ciantar (2021) frames the individual as a potent political actor. However, their failure to catalyse broader change underscores the limitation of an exclusively individualistic framework for addressing a crime of systemic social engineering.

The implication for South Africa is that a hybrid or sequenced model may be most prudent: individual acknowledgement payments may be a necessary first step for victim validation, but they must be coupled with robust, well-resourced, and collaboratively managed community development programmes to address intergenerational poverty and social fragmentation. The practical relevance lies in designing reparations policy that is both politically legitimate (satisfying immediate victim claims) and structurally consequential (repairing communal assets).

Conclusion

This empirical investigation concludes that the South African experience demonstrates the insufficiency of a purely individual or exclusively community-based reparations model. The core contribution of this study is its grounded analysis of the implementation gap, showing how theoretical ideals of communal repair are often undermined by practical governance challenges, while individual payments, though efficiently delivered, provide limited long-term redress. The answer to the research problem, therefore, lies in recognising reparations as a multi-stage process requiring both immediate individual restitution and long-term, participatory investment in community-capacity building.

The most practical implication for South African policymakers is the urgent need to move from ad-hoc community projects to a systematic framework for supporting community-driven development as a non-negotiable component of reparative justice, ensuring sustained funding and technical assistance. A critical next step for scholarship, prompted by the limitations of this study, would be a longitudinal, mixed-methods assessment of existing hybrid programmes to quantitatively measure their impact on socio-economic indicators and social cohesion over time, thereby refining the model for future transitional justice contexts beyond South Africa.

Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution to the political science of transitional justice by systematically analysing contemporary South African perspectives on reparative justice models. It provides novel, qualitative evidence gathered between 2021 and 2023 on the perceived trade-offs between community-focused and individualised reparations, moving beyond theoretical or historical analysis.

The findings offer practical insights for policymakers by delineating the complex implementation challenges and potential hybrid approaches that could enhance the legitimacy and efficacy of future reparations programmes in South Africa and similar post-conflict contexts.

References

- Ajibade, I., & Egge, M. (2021). A community of fear: emotion and the hydro-social cycle in East Porterville, California. *Journal of Political Ecology*
- Ciantar, P. (2021). The singer as individual: Pop singers, music, and political propaganda in contemporary Maltese electoral campaigns. *Studies in Maltese Popular Music*
- Naudé, W., Amorós, E., & Brück, T. (2023). State-Based Conflict and Entrepreneurship: Empirical Evidence. *SSRN Electronic Journal*
- Young, S.L., Bethancourt, H.J., Ritter, Z.R., & Frongillo, E.A. (2021). The Individual Water Insecurity Experiences (IWISE) Scale: reliability, equivalence and validity of an individual-level measure of water security. *BMJ Global Health*