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PREFACE

The African Program in Museum and Heritage Studies (APMHS) is a programme that has been offered as a Postgraduate Diploma qualification in Museum and Heritage Studies since 1998. It is undoubtedly the only Program of its kind, offered jointly by the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and Robben Island Museum (RIM), a World Heritage Site. It has been instrumental over the years in enhancing the interpretation of RIM through research projects and publications.

The primary objective of the APMHS is to create and extend vocational possibilities in the heritage, museum and tourism sectors. The Program is distinctive in that the education it offers is driven by an emphasis on a conceptual understanding of the terrain of public culture, of the challenges of social and institutional transformation, and of the work of representation. Through the Program, the study of museums and the worlds of heritage are approached in a manner that consistently, critically and practically engages with and challenges the dominant ways in which heritage is presented and represented. It further provides learning which allows students/ participants to apply theories, politics and issues of museum practically in a museum institution and therefore providing them with first hand quality knowledge and experience.

This publication is not different from others, as it continuously unpacks the history of the Island and provides deeper insight to areas of interest at RIM. The essays in this publication were submitted by students on the programme for the 2014 and 2015 academic years.
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THE HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF LEPROSY ON ROBBEN ISLAND:

1846-2014

by

COMFORT TAMANDA MTOTHA

A group of young men with leprosy posing with two staff members, undated.

Courtesy of Robben Island Museum
ABSTRACT

Although part of leprosy narrative in the Cape Colony in the nineteenth century has been well explored, limited attention has been given to the experiences of the people with leprosy. Most research has taken a top-down approach where the experience of people with leprosy is visible, but yet does not come out very clearly. This essay explores some recorded experiences of persons with leprosy in the Cape Colony with a focus on Robben Island. It represents life on the Island as socially complex and diverse. It highlights the multiple forms of resistance that people with leprosy expressed in reaction to authoritarian forms of government control. The paper is also an attempt to open up a debate as to how leprosy heritage can be more effectively represented alongside other aspects of the Island’s history. It is apparent that a certain interpretation comes to stand for the Island’s history: that of political imprisonment. This serves the interest of the current political elite but sidelines other layers of history.

The first chapter will examine the representation of leprosy in the existing literature. The second chapter used archival sources to attempt to uncover a stronger sense of the voices-feelings and experiences of people with leprosy on the Island, with a focus on the mid-late nineteenth century. The concluding chapter reflects on my experience of curating an exhibition on leprosy on the Island entitled *I want To Go Home! Leprosy on Robben Island* which opened on 7 November, 2014 at the Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island.
CHAPTER ONE: A ‘TOP-DOWN’ APPROACH TOWARDS THE HISTORY OF LEPROSY ON ROBBEN ISLAND, 1846-1931

Robben Island was opened as a museum in 1997 after it was handed over by the Department of Correctional Services. It was established by the post-apartheid government during Nelson Mandela’s regime. Since the opening of the museum, it has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in South Africa for both international and local tourists. It was declared a World Heritage Site in 1999. As a site, it has been understood as a cultural landscape that contains the built environment, with its allied structures that were constructed and demolished over a period of 350 years. Robben Island has different layers of human history and it is regarded to have been transformed by its inhabitants hence includes sites and places of cultural significance.¹ The Island is also rich in its intangible history, most notably from the oral histories of ex-political prisoners.

Through the policies of reconciliation and reconstruction, the post-apartheid government sought to construct a South Africa that is all inclusive, racially tolerant, and depicted as triumphant over a long and traumatic history. This is in line with the constructed slogan of the ‘rainbow nation’. The Robben Island Museum narrative is in keeping with its motto: ‘the triumph of the human spirit over adversity’. This representation of the Island is a model of hope and memory in the new democratic South Africa and has had implications to the way in which the history of the Island is represented.²

The dominant narrative of Robben Island as presented today is based on the life histories and personal experiences of prisoners, but especially prisoner 46664, Nelson Mandela. In South Africa and beyond the name Nelson Mandela is synonymous with the apartheid hero who sacrificed his life for the general good of the nation. The name is also a symbol and emblem of the nation building process in new post-apartheid South Africa. Mandela was imprisoned at Robben Island Maximum Prison for eighteen years of his life. The narrative of political imprisonment and experiences of political prisoners are the central theme and the anchor of Robben Island. This construction of the heritage of Robben Island downplays other layers of

history, especially earlier layers of the Island’s history, including the story of ‘lepers’ on the Island.

Apart from serving as a prison, Robben Island was also a ‘leper’ colony for almost a century: from 1846 to 1931. This is an important layer of the history of the Island which has a rich history. Leprosy patients living in the Cape Colony (later the Western Cape Province) were sent to Robben Island as banishment from the society. They were sent to the Island because there was a General Infirmary there. Patients were to be isolated and, in the long run, to be healed from a disease which was then believed to have no cure. Throughout this period, leprosy patients were regarded as outcasts and unclean because of their condition. They suffered from both a physical stigma and a social stigma. However, on the Island, a place that was deemed to give them refuge and hope they had diverse experiences. The complexity of their various accounts brings forth a narrative of their stories that need to be interpreted.

The representation of the story of leprosy patients on the Island is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, they were significant in numerical terms. This is to say, there were approximately 4,000 leprosy patients banished to the Island during this eight-five-year period. This is a substantial number given the population of the Cape Colony in the 1800s. Oral history says this is the same as the number of political prisoners who were sent to the Island from 1962 to 1991.

Secondly, the period (1846-1931) is important because of the extent to which the government dealt with the condition of the ‘lepers’ in question. The leprosy era begins with the period

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3 This essay will use ‘leper’ in inverted commas as it is a stereotype of the ‘unclean’, the ‘immoral’ and the ‘outcasts’
4 Leper is somebody with a medical condition of leprosy. Leprosy is a disease that affects the nervous system but its symptoms are notably observed on the skin. The disease is caused by a bacterium which affects the skin and disfigures the body parts. Some people had misconceived ideas and perceived leprosy to be associated with poverty and immorality. Leprosy has been in existence since 600 BC. Most people affected by leprosy were driven out of their communities and separated from their families. Some were unable to get jobs and some could not get shelter. In other parts of the world, leprosy was considered to be inherited rather than an infectious disease so marriages into leprous families were forbidden. Discrimination against leprosy patients in many societies was often linked to other social prejudices. Today, there are still people with leprosy in many parts of the world. See, Joy Rafferty, ‘Curing the Stigma of Leprosy’, Dundee, United Kingdom, 2005, 119-126
5 In 1891, Cape Colonial Government passed Leper Repression Act which demanded a compulsory segregation of the persons with leprosy. The government considered the sufferers to be dangerous, contagious and incurable hence worth to be isolated from the society and banished to Robben Island.
when Britain established control over the Cape Colony. The Cape Colony was given Representative Government with a Cape Parliament in 1853. Then, in 1873, the Cape was granted Responsible Government. As a result of the expansion of the empire, population and colonial control was very important. For this reason, the Cape government developed forms of exclusion that included segregation and the stigmatization of the ‘other’ races in society who were categorized as different from the white community. Harriet Deacon has shown that this development of racial forms of control was not just linked to new biological ideas of ‘race’, but also to a new medical discourse at the Cape.\(^7\)

Thirdly, the period that leprosy covered is an extensive one and banishment took many people into ‘exile’. An engagement with this history is therefore a study of a formative experience of South Africans with exile, a theme that would become central to the country’s history during the apartheid era.

A number of scholars and theorists have written about the history of Robben Island. Most scholars have focused on the political imprisonment era. Some have focused very specifically on Nelson Mandela, the man and the icon. In *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid*, Fran Buntman provides a detailed distressing account of the painful experiences of prisoners on the Island. Buntman provides insight into the torture and humiliation faced by this group of people at the hands of brutal prison authorities. She highlights the extent of racism, coercion and control that was instigated by those in power. Buntman also brings out the solidarity amongst the prisoners that enabled them to resist their authorities as a way of survival and to reclaim their dignity.\(^8\)

Only a small proportion of the literature deals with other social groups like people with leprosy on Robben Island. One scholar in particular, Harriet Deacon, has looked at the changing approach in social history to different groups of people that were at the Island.\(^9\) In particular, she has looked at the group of leprosy patients who were banished to the Island in detail in one chapter of her doctoral thesis. She looks at the medical history and medical knowledge that was used to shape people by those in power on the Island. The doctors used medical knowledge and practice as a way of controlling people. In this chapter, ‘Leprosy,

\(^7\)See Deacon, *A History of the Medical Institutions on Robben Island, 1846-1910*, 203.


Racism and Segregation’, Deacon shows that those in power used their authority to interpret situations in a way that encouraged compliance from the ruled or the ‘subordinate class’. She shows that colonial administrators and doctors stereotyped leprosy as a ‘black disease’, which they saw was being contracted through African cultural practices.\textsuperscript{10}

Leprosy in the Cape Colony was thought to have been imported with the slaves, free blacks and descendants of those imported from the East. The belief was that the disease was probably in an undeveloped stage when slaves were imported, and they fully became ‘leprous’ at the Cape. Having no records as to substantiate this theory about the origins of leprosy, the Cape Government focused on an Ordinance promulgated by Lord Charles Somerset on the 11\textsuperscript{th} February, in 1817.

Leprosy has of late years considerably increased within the settlement. Only in the district of Swellendam there was any retreat provided for the unfortunate sufferers. The idea was gaining ground that the disorder was contagious, and that consecutively the distressed sufferers were frequently left in a state of abandonment, and that therefore it was expedient to allot to Hottentots, free blacks and slaves, labouring under this evil, a healthy and airy spot to retire to where they might receive such aid as required.\textsuperscript{11}

The government came to believe that it would be ideal to set up a system of segregation with a slight modification of sending them to far off places. Persons with leprosy were regarded as ‘unfortunate sufferers’ whose hope was lost. The main objective of the government was to stamp out the disease in the Colony. For this reason, the Colony required strict measures that each person suffering from the disease would follow. Maynard Swanson points out that the infectious diseases and concepts of public health, operating as societal metaphors, seem to have exercised a powerful influence on the origins and development of urban segregation in South Africa.\textsuperscript{12} In 1846, the Cape Colony under the authority of the Colonial Secretary, John Montagu established a General Infirmary at Robben Island for the purposes of treating

\textsuperscript{10} See Deacon, A History of the Medical Institutions on Robben Island, 1846-1910, 204.
\textsuperscript{11} Cape Archives Depot, (CCP 4/10/3/1/ G10-94), Leibbrand, Minutes of Inquiry: Leprosy Commission of 1894, 35.
‘lunatics’, ‘lepers’ and the chronically ill.\textsuperscript{13} Deacon writes that the Island was a useful repository for the unwanted. She recommends that we interpret these measures as a means of social control rather than a humanitarian or medical solution to society’s problems.\textsuperscript{14}

With the increasing numbers of people with leprosy in various areas of the Cape and the continuing misconception in the years between 1840 and 1870 that leprosy was contagious, the Cape Colonial Government passed a law in 1884. The law necessitated the immediate provision of accommodation for those with leprosy.

It shall be certified to the Governor, by the district surgeon of any district, or by any other duly qualified medical practitioner, and by a field-cornet or justice of the peace, that any person is suffering from the disease known as leprosy, and that the fact of that person being at large is likely to spread such disease, the Governor may, by warrant under the hand of the Colonial Secretary, order that such person shall be removed to such asylum or hospital, as he shall appoint, to be there detained… and kept apart from contact with all other inmates of such asylum or hospital who are not afflicted with the same disease… Every asylum or hospital in which males shall be detained under the provisions of this Act shall be separated entirely from any asylum or hospital in which females shall be detained.\textsuperscript{15}

By this period, those with leprosy were sent to several centres of ‘confinement’ to receive treatment including Hemel-en-Aarde near Caledon. In 1891 a Leper Repression Act was passed based on the 1884 Act, as a result of the growing fear that leprosy was contagious. The Act demanded the strict racial and physical segregation to all people who were believed to have leprosy.\textsuperscript{16} At this point, other chronic skin diseases were also considered to be leprosy. There was a belief that leprosy was coming in with people from the neighbouring states of the Colony from the sea coast area.\textsuperscript{17} In introducing measures to control it from spreading to the rest of the population, the state found it necessary to banish the sick from the

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\textsuperscript{13} Harriet Deacon, \textit{The Island: A History of Robben Island 1488 - 1990}, (Cape Town, David Philip Publishers, 1996), 57
\textsuperscript{14} See Deacon, \textit{A History of the Medical Institutions on Robben Island, 1846-1910}, 54
\textsuperscript{15} Taken from the 1884 Leper Repression Act which was passed in Cape Parliament but not gazetted.
\textsuperscript{16} Harriet Deacon, \textit{A History of the Medical Institutions on Robben Island, 1846-1910}, 223.
\textsuperscript{17} CAD, (CCP 4/10/3/1/ G10-94), Leibbrand, \textit{Minutes of Inquiry: Leprosy Commission of 1894}, 35.
\end{flushright}
mainstream society. At the Cape, the most suitable place was seen to be Robben Island. The presence of the General Infirmary was used as a good justification for banishing persons with leprosy to the Island.

The concept of race also played a significant role in this seclusion which was influenced by the white settlers’ perceptions of ‘blacks’. The latter were seen as physically different from whites and uniquely prone to the disease. They were perceived as ‘immoral’ with ‘filthy habits’, which made them a natural scapegoat to explain outbreaks of disease more generally.\(^\text{18}\) The greatest fear was that they could spread the disease to the white community. The isolation of these people was accepted by the white middle and upper classes and was enforced by law. It is in this period where most people were removed from their homes under a police warrant, as the state realised there may be resistance from families and friends. One of the patients objected that:

\[
\text{I consider that I was brought here in a scandalous manner. The doctor came and said he wanted to see me, and afterwards I got a letter from the magistrate saying I must be removed to Robben Island.}\(^\text{19}\)
\]

Many people left the Cape Colony and others were hidden by their friends to evade capture. The issue of class also played a role. Well-to-do people were not treated in the same way as the ‘poor lepers’. Once a ‘leper’, you were declared a state ‘threat’ and measures would be put in place to ‘quarantine’ you. People with leprosy would be restricted from associating with healthy people, or enter public places.

This not only dehumanized them but was psychological torture as it marginalised them from their own communities. Persons with leprosy began to alienate themselves from their inner self which often lead to self-stigma and self-hatred. It should be understood that once patients were quarantined, they would not physically communicate with the outside world. Even when they were given a chance to write letters, the authorities ensured that their ‘letters were baked to kill possible germs’\(^\text{20}\).


\(^{20}\) Mary Eastwood, Robben Island AB2538 file, (University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library) 1980.
In mainstream society, most of them lost their identities. They were no longer called by their names; they started to be referred to as ‘lepers’ which is a stereotype of ‘immoral’ or ‘unclean’. This is one of the reasons some accepted their fate of banishment to the Island to live amongst people who had the same condition as themselves. This segregation may be linked to what Orlando Patterson calls ‘social death’ in the context of slavery. People with leprosy were uprooted from their families and losing their names and identities in the same way as slaves.²¹

In The Island: A History of Robben Island 1488 -1990, (1996), Harriet Deacon asserts that those in power considered Robben Island to be a place of banishment, where the misfits of the society were sent. She argues that the banishment represented a symbolic cleansing of the Southern African subcontinent.²² In portraying this control and governance, Deacon gives an interesting theory of the medical knowledge and power that the doctors used. She shows that apart from the belief in contagion, doctors also stereotyped leprosy as hereditary. This belief came about in the 1860s and 1870s. Doctors believed that leprosy runs in the bloodline which may have an effect on the whole population if the ‘infected’ people bear children. For this reason, the banished patients were segregated by gender on the Island; contact between male and female leprosy patients was restricted and there was increased social control. The doctors believed that leprosy has an effect on female sexual desire. They believed whenever women with leprosy get excited, they became very hysterical and ‘they would [solicit] men if they had an opportunity’.²³ Such knowledge from doctors controlled the women from wandering about the Island unless they were in the company of a nurse. In Esiqithini: The Robben Island Exhibition (1996), Deacon summarises the chronology of these events related to the leprosy period.²⁴

In The Essential: Robben Island (1997), Deacon changes from the top-down approach to a narrative technique in which she links events through biographical sketches. This is to say, in order to understand events of each historical layer on the Island, she uses the story of an individual who was prominent in that period to establish her conclusions. The central theme is resistance to those in power. Deacon uses symbolism to portray the way in which life on the Island was seen as Heaven, Hell, or occasionally Purgatory by different groups. Deacon’s

²¹ Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1-14.
²³ CAD, (CCP 4/10/3/1/ G10-94), Moore, Minutes of inquiry: Leprosy Commission of 1894, 146.
symbolism brings out the idea of the physical regeneration that the medical institution at the Island offered; healing and maintenance of the body. Sea bathing was thought to improve the skin condition of the ‘lepers’. The symbolism of hell is being encompassed in the idea of banishment from which no one would return and in what she shows to have been terrible living conditions. On the other hand, purgatory has been symbolically used as a place of hope. Deacon attempts to portray the contestation of living on the Island by attempting to understand the life of the banished patients.

Echoing Deacon’s idea on segregation and her narrative technique, Sandra Young shows the extent to which the patients were isolated and lived like prisoners on the Island. She shows the harshness of the patients’ situation, the state of neglect and the separation from their families. To concur with Young, Barbara Hutton mentions that leprosy patients were treated with the same cruelty as dangerous criminals; they were chained and beaten. She adds that the sufferers complained that the place was damp, moist and unwholesome. Patients also expressed the feeling that the Island was a place of sorrow and of lonely exile, unlike what they had expected. Hutton emphasizes social control and stigma, the methods deployed by the colonial government that made patients accept exile on the Island in fear of persecution by a nervous public on the mainland.

In the light of the above, it is evident that Deacon is the major scholar who has done the most extensive research on the history of leprosy on Robben Island. I find her literature to be enormously useful. However, in her representation I noticed a ‘top-down approach’, which highlights the control by both the medical institution on Robben Island and the colonial government. The experience of ‘lepers’ does not come through as strongly. In the literature, she gives some evidence of their experiences, but not really ‘from below’, through the ‘lepers’ own voices.

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27 Sandra Young, Robben Island – A Living Memory, (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter Publishers), 2003.
In one of her last articles (2006), Deacon’s approach changes to the direction towards the human subjects. Here she seeks to recover leprosy voices and identities. This is the aspect I want to develop in the following chapter: the experience of leprosy. Is it possible to get an inner view of leprosy patients? I will attempt to understand the ‘lepers’ world through their own statements from this era as well as through accounts of their actions. Then, I will look at how the interpretation and presentation of this aspect of the history and heritage at the Island may be introduced to the wider public through a museum exhibition.

CHAPTER TWO: THE STRENGTH OF THE INFIRM: RECASTING LEPROSY ON ROBBEN ISLAND – FROM SOCIAL CONTROL TO RESISTANCE AND COMMUNITY SURVIVAL

The individual life stories of persons with leprosy at Robben Island have been complex. The exaggerated emphasis in the existing literature has been on ‘segregation’ which includes how the government dealt with the ‘sufferers’. There has been less attention paid to how the ‘lepers’ themselves made lives against the odds. In this chapter, I will try to explore aspects of the experience of ‘lepers’ on the Island. I draw particularly on the Commission of Enquiry of 1894 which brings to light an understanding of social control, but also reveals aspects of the social lives of persons with leprosy.

It should be noted that there was an expansion of Commissions of Enquiry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was linked to the discourses of race and segregation. Adam Ashworth shows that the racial control of the population prompted a discourse about ‘natives’ and the need for their segregation. Yet the 1894 Commission of Enquiry also reveals the voices of individual ‘lepers’ that can be recovered. The 1894 Commission of Enquiry was an attempt to investigate the conditions of people with leprosy on the Island. The authorities on the Commission, who included doctors and colonial administrators, wanted to establish whether leprosy was contagious. They were determined to establish the degree to which this hereditary disease could contaminate the whole society. They also tried to find out whether the existing systems of physical, racial and gender segregation were being carried out effectively and whether Robben Island’s climate, soil and general characteristics had any influence on the spread of leprosy.

I am also keen to explore the complex experiences of persons with leprosy in the early twentieth century. In this respect I want to highlight that life on the Island was not the same for all individuals. It varied according to race and sex. There was not one ‘leper’ experience across the years. The experiences varied according to different periods of life (age) and contexts in this century long history. The narrative is not to be understood as one of diseased people who did not understand anything, but as agents in their own histories who took ownership of their lives.

31 This is one of the names the doctors and the Colonial Government officials would use to refer to the patients.
The Strength of the Infirm

Upon arriving on Robben Island, the ‘lepers’ realised that the segregation they experienced in society on the mainland was only the beginning. The doctors used the ideas of medical science and deployed their expertise to control people. The Island was divided into two parts – the village, and the ‘leper’ settlement.

![Male ‘Leper’ Settlement, Robben Island, undated](image)

Figure 1. Male ‘Leper’ Settlement, Robben Island, undated

Courtesy of the Western Cape Archives and Records Service

The ‘leper’ settlement was classified according to gender: the males were situated on the eastern side of the Island, whilst females were at Murray’s Bay at the north-eastern end of the Island. The male settlement was classified into six pavilions according to racial background: Pavilion for ‘Coloured patients’, Free State Pavilion, Pavilion for White patients, Bastard Pavilion – with some Malays in it, Hottentots Pavilion, and Kafir Pavilion.33 This system of classification was common in census and official documents of the nineteenth century. Apart from the general perception that the ‘natives’ were poor with ‘filthy habits’, the categorisation was done to study the behaviour of the ‘other’ races which was viewed with stereotypes and prejudice as ‘primitive’, ‘native’ and worth monitoring. Racial segregation and discrimination was at the core of the hospital. The surgeon superintendents would support this segregation. White patients could not associate with other races who were ‘so far below in civilisation’.34

33 Most of the Pavilions were constructed with iron and wood which were not suitable for patients not only because of the poor ventilation but were cold at night and on rainy cold day. These Pavilions were also overcrowded.

The belief that leprosy was contagious was widespread among the authorities on Robben Island. It was feared that the disease could spread to the ‘village’, which was a settlement for the hospital staff. There was a gate that separated the ‘village’ and the ‘leper’ compound. It was kept locked at all times. This gate was referred to as the ‘Gate of Tears’. People with leprosy were not allowed to pass through it. It was also a place where the people with leprosy themselves met their relatives, as relatives were not allowed into the compound. They called it the ‘Gate of Tears’ because of the many tears that flowed from the patients’ themselves and the relatives when it was time to bid farewell to each other. This gate became symbolically important to the people with leprosy: it was a place of memory because each one of them passed through this gate of ‘no return’ upon their arrival on Robben Island. One could argue that the ‘Gate of Tears’ was a symbol of their banishment to this segregated ‘leper’ colony. It can be seen as similar to the gates of ‘no return’ at slave forts along the coast of Africa where the slaves were taken from their homelands onto the slave ships bound for the Americas.

The Island was dominated by rules and regulations imposed by the doctors. It became difficult for patients to meet their families at this ‘little patched exile’. Apart from the fact that the rowing boats could not go to the Island daily, visitors had restricted access to the Island. Most patients were only visited once a year when the government booked accommodation for the relatives to cross over the Island to see them. Surrounded by the wild ocean, cut off from the mainland, there was no room for escape and little hope of seeing their families more than once a year. Without proper structures on the Island and barely a few trees for shed, the Island’s weather was unhealthy for the patients. This much is clear from the testimonies of Mrs. S. Arendse and Mr. R.A.K in 1894:

The sun is very hot, and the dust troubles us. There is nothing comfortable…We have to keep inside when the wind blows; the people get bad eyes on the Island from the dust and the glare of the sand.36

In winter time…it is so draughty. You cannot imagine how windy it is on the Island and I think it is must be the worst place in the whole world to bring people to.37

35 Birch, M.E, ‘When Robben Island was a Leper Compound’, (University of Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library: Manuscripts Collection of Robben Island), 2.
People with leprosy expressed their desire to return to the mainland considering that the weather was so harsh. The Island was, at times, misty if it did not become too hot or too cold. Considering that most of the patients came from marginalized communities, many did not have adequate clothing to withstand the cold weather. The authorities were meant to provide extra clothing considering that it was a hospital. But with the increasing number of the patients on the Island, there was a decline in the quality of both food and medical care, especially during the 1880s and 1890s. It became difficult for people with leprosy to receive medical care as per the promises they were given before coming to the Island. Some were given a herb, ‘chaulmoogra oil’ to rub on their bodies which occasionally gave them eruptions. Many patients could not get medicine except when they asked for it. Many of them were afraid to complain, because of the threat of ill treatment from the wardens. They kept saying that they were brought to the Island by false promises.

Since I have been here, I have not had a drop of medicine…I am just the same…There is not a bit of comfort here.

Yes, I am thankful to the Government for finding me a place to go and maintaining me, but I am not thankful for this place, because it is unhealthy.

Life in exile became difficult for the patients. In summer, they seldom got fresh meals; they would be given rotten meat and stale bread. The water was salty and the tea tasted bitter. The food was in this state, because it was brought from the mainland and the voyage and storage facilities on the Island were not reliable. Since patients were often treated differently according to class and race, their complaints about food varied from ward to ward.

41 CAD, (CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94), an interview with Johannes Gerts. He made a comparison of Robben Island to Hemel-en-Aarde hospital where he had lived for 20 years before his banishment to Robben Island.
42 CAD, (CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94), testimonies from patients in 1894, 195-199.
The 1894 Food Protest

On an April day in 1894, the patients were given their standard meal during lunch time. The patients realised that the meat had a horrible smell. Most of them remembered the rotten meat that had been brought to the Island on the previous day. But little did they know that this meat was being prepared for them. Apart from the smell, the meat was not well cooked. They claimed it was put in the pot without being washed. Some patients complained that the butter was full of flies and the eggs were rotten. This was the second time that they had been given this kind of meal. But Petrus Booy explained to the Commissioners just how aggressively doctors responded to food complaints:

Last week we got meat that was not fit to eat as it stank. The tea and coffee were also bad. We went over in a body to complain. When we got there, Dr. Impey (one of the senior doctors on the Island) said that if anyone made any more noise about the food, he would be shot. A policeman had a pistol in his hand. I stood close to him. I had nothing in my hand and I made no effort to do anything. I only spoke. The only men who had sticks were cripples. Their feet were sore.

There were fifty unarmed male patients who went to complain about the food that day. A number of them were teenagers. They felt it was necessary to join the group to protest. Perhaps they hoped that they would be heard and improvements would follow. The main intention of the protest was to make it clear to the doctors that they did not want to eat food that was unhealthy. Deacon points out that many patients suffered from bowel complaints as a result of bad food and bad water. The group of protesters was stopped immediately by the constables with their revolvers. They threatened the bold crowd with a directive from the doctor. The constables ‘caught hold of one man named Arendse and struggled with him, and tried to take him to prison.’

The constables claimed that the men were violent and carried sticks and knobkerries. They alleged that one of the rioters bit the hand of a constable. As Arendse (a male patient) was being taken away from the group, he threw himself on the ground in desperation.

44 CAD (CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94), Ross, Minutes of Inquiry, Leprosy Commission of 1894, 199.
45 CAD (CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94), Booy, Minutes of Inquiry, Leprosy Commission of 1894, 195.
46 See Deacon The Island: A History of Robben Island, 1488-1990, 64.
47 CAD (CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94), Keur, Minutes of Inquiry: Leprosy Commission of 1894, 195.
Immediately, another man took his place as the ring leader and the protest continued. They drew closer to the man who had drawn his revolver. Without fear, they said to one other, ‘he can only shoot one of us’.\textsuperscript{48} The patients were ready to be shot for demanding more humane treatment. Women did not just sit down when this protest was taking place. They also surrounded Dr. Impey, following him out of their compound, trying to reason with him and raising other grievances. The resistance to their authorities was done in order for those in power to take action of their condition.

This was not the first time that women with leprosy had challenged the authorities. In 1893 a woman with leprosy had complained to the Colonial Office that Dr. Todd had spoken rudely to them. They demonstrated with a view of showing their desire to get away from the Island. Those who were interviewed returned again and again to the desire to go home.

I do not care about amusements. It is very hard for me to be separated from my parents. I would like to go back tomorrow if I could.\textsuperscript{49}

I do not want to make any complaint about the food. I only want to go home. My heart is very sore, as I have a wife and children and want to see them . . . The youngest is four years old and the oldest fourteen. They cannot work for themselves . . . We are the unhappiest people in the world . . . I only know I want to go home.\textsuperscript{50}

Another major protest had been launched in 1892 against the increasingly repressive control following to the Leper Repression Act of 1891. Franz Jacobs was a leader of this rebellion. Jacobs was fighting for the rights of his fellow ‘lepers’ who were banished without their consent and were left on the Island as socially dead people. I believe they regarded themselves as dead because the society pretended they did not exist. This Act also made them like criminals who were sentenced to a permanent exile with the crime of being diagnosed with leprosy. Deacon explains that the resistance was expressed within the same frame of

\textsuperscript{48} CAD (CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94), Moore, an assistant of the male and female settlement, Minutes of Inquiry: Leprosy Commission of 1894, 498.
\textsuperscript{49} See CAD (CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94), Regensburg, Minutes of Inquiry: Leprosy Commission of 1894, 200.
\textsuperscript{50} Robben Island Working Archives, Retrieved from Harriet Deacon’s archival material. Caspar Lindeboom, was a blacksmith and was admitted on Robben Island in 1891.
reference as criticisms of ‘native policy’ in the early twentieth century. She indicates that they stressed their loss of rights as citizens and referred to the injustice of their treatment as a form of ‘slavery’ because they were not being treated as ‘free British subjects’. Their main complaint was about their separation from their families. They demanded better living conditions, which meant ‘table napkins, beer, table cruets and extra sugar.’ They opposed the introduction of female nurses to work in their wards, and threatened to combine forces with the convicts and to attack white women on the Island if they were restricted access to the female ‘leper’ compound. As a learned man, Franz Jacobs decided to write a letter to Queen Victoria to express his outrage at the treatment given to them from such an ‘enlightened’ Government.

Is it right that British subjects be forcibly apprehended and removed from their homes to Robben Island, there to be kept forever and ever? Is it right that man and wife should be separated? . . . Before the Leprosy Repression Act (1891) we were allowed to visit our wives, families and friends occasionally on the mainland and that privilege has now been entirely withdrawn and we are left as people who are dead. Why should those with leprosy be dragged from their homes and treated on this Island, worse than slaves and convicts? Even convicts who have committed crimes are eventually set free while those with leprosy, God fearing people who have done no wrong, are sentenced to life imprisonment. What I really wish to ask the Government is that I can have my freedom. I do not wish to complain of anything else but the loss of my freedom.

The authorities did not like complaints to the Queen. They regarded Jacobs as a troublemaker and were concerned he would influence the entire group to become ‘rebels’. They exiled him to the Old Somerset Hospital until he acknowledged that ‘he had been wrong to rebel’ and that he had been ‘under the influence of the devil’. Soon after this protest, additional men were posted to the Island for extra security. They became known as the ‘leper police.’

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51 See Deacon, A History of the Medical Institutions on Robben Island, 1846-191, 203
52 Ibid, Deacon, 203
53 Robben Island Research Unit Working Archives, Retrieved from Harriet Deacon’s archival material. Franz Jacobs, letter to Queen Victoria.
54 See Deacon, The Island: A History of Robben Island, 1488 – 1990, 64
55 Ibid, Deacon, 64
In 1893 females with leprosy had boycotted work claiming that they had been put on the Island against their will. They stopped doing anything for themselves, which included sending their dirty clothes to the newly-built laundry. They refused to assist in sanitary work, the cleaning of their own rooms, or sweeping the surroundings. Deacon mentions that they believed such institutional work made them like convicts. They compared it with forced labour. These women wanted to be treated in a more dignified manner and not like institutional workers. The concept of slavery could again be applied here: they felt like they were being treated as the property of the authorities. The notion of slavery could be linked to what Fritz Diederichs, a ‘leper’ patient at Robben Island, clearly mentioned in one of the patients’ petitions in 1894:

The first of December 1894 was a happy day because God had given England the power, 64 years before, to free their people [slaves] and gave England 20 million pounds and over a thousand people were freed so that men and women and children could together worship and thank the Lord; My Honour, what have we done that we cannot enjoy this right? We are guarded like slaves at night and day by constables… We are now becoming impatient about this godless and sinful law.

In response to the protests, the patients saw some improvements made to buildings and sanitation facilities. In addition, families of people with leprosy were allowed free passage to visit the Island, although this only happened once a year.

Deacon points out that white ‘lepers’ did not participate in these protests. Instead, they complained that they needed to be segregated on the mainland away from the ‘coloured’ patients. The white ‘lepers’ received more privileges, better treatment, and even had the freedom to wander about the Island. Deacon points out that their longing for their own ‘segregation’ led the government to build four semi-detached cottages on the Island between 1892 and 1893.
Starvation and Survival

With increased regulation and control on the Island, the patients were always a target. They were usually suspects and could be blamed, even for ‘wrongdoing’ that they did not commit. On one evening in 1861, the remains of a sheep were found near the ‘leper’ settlement. The ward attendant suspected that it was the male ‘lepers’ that had killed the sheep. Without any further investigation, he rounded up a suspect. Dr. Minto believed that the allegations were true. As a man of power and authority, he gave instructions that they should be confined to their room at night.\(^{59}\)

Realising that they were restricted to move about in their settlement, the male ‘lepers’ refused to go in their rooms at night. They preferred to be outside than to be under lock and key. Dr. Minto became annoyed with this refusal by the ‘lepers’. He gave an order to an attendant to lock them out at nine o’clock in the evening which he did per the directive. Unfortunately, there was bad weather and it rained that evening. Afraid of making their health conditions worse, the men broke the lock on the door and went into their house. Dr. Minto became furious at this ‘disrespectful’ demonstration. He demanded to know the man that was behind such actions. Twelve male leprosy patients told him plainly that they were all guilty. They claimed that they removed the lock as a team.

Dr. Minto demanded that they should not be given their rations, taking into consideration their mischievous behaviour. These men were starved for thirteen days. Afraid that their health may be compromised and their condition may worsen, Dr. Minto ordered that they be given their rations as before. Because of their formation of social bonds, the patients supported one another in this time of starvation. Some of the patients from the other wards shared their portion of food with the starving ones. Others decided to pick up cray-fish at the beach which they ate. The ‘lepers’ lived in the best way they could to survive.\(^{60}\) As observed, this hospital was one of the spaces that instigated oppression, humiliation and abuse instead of treating patients.

Another way of rebelling against restriction of movement was to maneuver around the back of the Island. Some leprosy patients went to the sea once a week at their favourite spot to take

\(^{59}\) CAD, (CPP, G31-1861-2), Based on the interview with Mr. Murry, Minutes of Inquiry, Leprosy Commission of 1861, 29.

\(^{60}\) COD, (CPP, G31-1861-2), Murry, Minutes of Inquiry, Leprosy Commission of 1861, 29.
a bath. No one seemed to be responsible for their daily cleanliness. The bathrooms within their compounds did not supply them with hot water. Therefore, in other compounds, the bathroom and the kitchen served the same purpose and there was no chance to differentiate them. Patients would use the bathroom at their own will. Living in the hope of getting away from the Island, the sea was a meeting point; a place where they would exchange ideas. Sometimes, they talked about how they could escape. The most effective way of escaping was to combine forces with the convicts on the Island. Most of these convicts were sentenced to the Island for life. As an escape plan, leprosy patients assembled wood and other materials from ship-wrecks to construct rowing boats which they assumed will take them back home. These escape boats were confiscated every now and then by the authorities.61 As another option, patients would plan on getting the boats of the authorities to escape to the mainland. In 1852, Piet Van der Os, planned such an escape with his friends but they were not successful:

I helped to take the Island boat from Murray’s Bay, with Kieviet, Boesak and Klaas. I did so from ill-treatment by the doctor, who struck me twice with a sjambok, which he carries in his pocket. I was then placed in the black hole.62

Most of the planned escapes were prompted by ill treatment from doctors. If the ill-treatment was too intense, they could think of reporting the matter to Cape Town where there was the Colonial Secretary. They had hoped that the Colonial Secretary would help them in one way or another.

I once saw the doctor with a stick in the . . . ward. He was going to beat a [man] named Kieviet, but Kieviet took the stick out of the doctor’s hands. The doctor then obtained another stick, and on his return to the ward, the whole room rose, and there was a general uproar.63

In later years, tired of the disturbances with the authorities, one brave man obtained a pass from Dr. Impey to go and meet his friends at the boathouse. He had just arrived on Robben Island and nobody knew his character. He went to the cargo boat and somehow hid himself under some goods that had been loaded. The boat was rowed by the convicts and the boatmen to the steamer, which had docked for a period of time on the Island. It was only later

61 Charlene Smith, Robben Island, (Cape Town, Struik Publishers, 1997), 35.
62 Robben Island Working Archives, Minutes of inquiry, Leprosy Commission of 1852. Piet Van der Os, person with leprosy on Robben Island planned to escape with his friends but was not successful.
63 John Strike, overseer under Dr. Birtwhistle, 1852.
discovered that he was escaping the Island. He was brought back to the shore. He too was banished to the ‘black hole’.

Relationships

With lack of evidence to substantiate the cause of leprosy, the doctors deployed their expertise to prevent the transmission of leprosy from mothers to the new born babies. For this reason, the female compound was situated far away from the male leprosy settlement. It was surrounded by a barbed wire fence that enclosed four acres of ground. The only buildings near the compound were the matron’s quarter and a cottage occupying a white leprosy patient with her two children. The female leprosy patients had constables were patrolling because medical science assumed that the disease had an impact on the female sex drive. Before setting out these rules and regulations, Rev Baker pointed out that patients had frequent communication, and the first child buried on the Island was a child born of leprous parents who were not married. He further said that another child was born and the father was a convict. This child was still living with his mother on the Island. By this time, patients used to cohabit in the fowl-houses. But in 1871 the female leprosy patients were removed from the Island to Old Somerset Hospital on the mainland. Female leprosy patients’ detention and their being returned to the Island under lock and key must have arisen from their escaping from the hospital on the mainland. The authorities had a mentality that the females were capable of getting away which could lead to more children being born of leprosy.

Furthering the understanding of this control on Robben Island, the women were always in the company of a matron if they needed to move within their compounds. They were only allowed to go to a certain distance. This treatment can again be likened to how slaves were treated in the nineteenth century, particularly slave women. Slave women suffered at the hands of slaveholders and were restricted from moving beyond their households. Persons with leprosy were deprived the freedom of leaving the Island, or from seeing the outside world.

64 CAD, [CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94], Minutes of Evidence, Leprosy Commission of 1894, 12.
65 CAD, [CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94], Moore, Minutes of Inquiry, Leprosy Commission of 1894, 146.
66 Robben Island Research Unit Working Archives, Esther Johns who worked as a general servant, was admitted on Robben Island in 1906. She is amongst the women who gave birth to a child on the Island.
We have no freedom on the Island. We are only allowed to go a certain distance, and when our visitors come we only have them in the compound and they are not allowed to go further. We are locked up inside the gates, and our visitors cannot go a little way with us. We have to say ‘No, we have only a certain distance in which we are allowed to move’.  

There was punishment imposed on those who broke this law: sometimes a month’s imprisonment if you were found in the compound of the opposite sex. This kind of punishment was interpreted under the Police Offences Act for entering an enclosed area at night. Tired of these rules and regulations, male leprosy patients would get away from their compounds at night and visit female compound. Love amongst the banished people with leprosy was possible. Men would climb the barbed wire-fence or get underneath it to see their lovers or female friends.  

This fence at the female compound was regarded as an ‘incitement to immorality’ by the authorities. It was used by the women to hang and spread out their shawls. They would stand under this improvised tent to talk to men on the other side. Sometimes men would be seated outside while the women sat inside. The men got close to the fence as they could to converse, exchange gifts and other items. To others, the shawls were used to keep off the sun when it was very hot. This fence was also used by the men to tell women their escape plans and of any protest they were planning to have.  

Ironically, some male patients would ask the doctor or the medical officer for a pass to see their female friends. The male ‘lepers’ were only allowed to go down in the afternoon to the female compound and could chat until evening. They were given turns; eighteen people were allowed to visit at a time.  

People were left to themselves there for a considerable time till it got dusk...  

Ibid, Moore, 498.
The men themselves very often told me that they would have connection with the leper women and even with assistants.\textsuperscript{72}

Though the passes were supposed to be given to the married couples, single men also asked for permission. These passes allowed male leprosy patients to see women.

**Community**

An important aspect of patients’ lives on the Island was how they dealt with their everyday life on the Island, given all the restrictions in place. They adopted a number of survival strategies. They formed social bonds that enabled them to exchange support and skills, tapping into their diverse backgrounds and occupational abilities. The kindness of one patient towards another was the most praiseworthy. They cared for one other and shared traditional medicines, especially when treatment by doctors ceased. When Rebecca Marais, a sick patient, was interviewed in 1894, she confirmed this treatment and attendance: ‘[Cooking] is done by the nurse sometimes we get things from the hands of brown people, when their hands are full of sores. One sick person has to look after another.’\textsuperscript{73}

Under the leadership of Franz Jacobs, patients organized letter writing classes to provide a means of communicating with families and friends. Most of them came to the Island from diverse backgrounds. Jacobs was a teacher back on the mainland and used his gifts on the Island. ‘I have a Day school and a Catechising School, also an English School and the people are progressing well. I will select an under schoolmaster soon. I have my hands full; but if God spares me, I think in the course of a year several will be able to write their own letters.’\textsuperscript{74}

Determined to keep occupied, some helped with the laundry and carpentry, while others worked as cooks and grave-diggers. Some patients wanted piecework, because they found it hard to wash their own clothes. Many did not have all their fingers due to the effects of leprosy. These jobs helped them pay for their washing. It appears to me that most people with leprosy accepted their being on the Island because they let go of hopes of returning home. They either speculated that they would die on the Island, or that society was not going to accept them. One old man was brought to the Island as a ‘leper’. He brought his coffin with


\textsuperscript{73} CAD, (CCP/4/10/3/1/G10-94), Marais, *Minutes of Inquiry, Leprosy Commission of 1894*, 199.

\textsuperscript{74} Robben Island Research Unit Working Archives, Retrieved from Harriet Deacon’s archival material, Franz Jacobs letter to the Under Colonial Secretary in 1892.
him. He discovered an old cemetery dating back to the sixteenth century. He started working on the overgrown bushes, cleared the yard and had the place renovated. His only plea was to be buried in this graveyard he discovered years earlier among some of the Old Dutch veterans.\footnote{James W. Fish, \textit{Robben Island: The Home of the Leper}. (Kilmarnock, Scotland, 1924), 2.}

Some men engaged in fishing. Every now and then they were seen at the sea with their fishing lines. They spent the whole day at the sea, though standing in such wet places was not healthy given their condition. Cooking was also done by the patients themselves and a few were assisted by the nurses.\footnote{CAD, (CCP/4/10/3/1/ G10-94), \textit{Minutes of Evidence, Leprosy Commission of 1894}, 19.} It should be mentioned that both men and women strengthened their spirituality and gave one another emotional support. Prayers were at the heart of the patients’ lives. Interest in prayer and spirituality came about from the stereotypical attitude of people, particularly the missionaries, towards leprosy. Missionaries had the belief that if one is diagnosed with the disease, it meant you were ‘a sinner’ and are ‘cursed’. The only hope for you not to die in sin was to repent. Most Robben Island patients rejected this and took ownership of their lives.

They occasionally went to take baths at the ‘Pool of Bethesda’, located at the back of the Island to cleanse themselves from the disease. They linked the pool with the biblical connotation of being healed by water.

Figure 2: ‘Pool of Bethesda’ as it appears today, 2014
Women were creative in making decorative objects which were sometimes in very bright colours. They used the available materials found on the Island, particularly shells. Some of these objects were sold on the Island, when people visited. The Rev. Clementon’s wife brought materials from the mainland and she was involved in helping with this work.

Others directed their energies towards entertainment and recreational activities including sport. It was difficult for patients to entertain themselves considering the exile. However, most of them adjusted to this life. Others played musical instruments and games, such as cards and draughts. They tried to look at life in a certain way of surviving. There was an all ‘male band’, a singing group that was formed to entertain this community.

Amongst leprosy patients, birthday parties and other celebrations became part and parcel of their way of life. It reminded them of home where they had more freedom and were treated with dignity.

The annual show was very popular in the Cape Colony. The Government gave £10 for prizes on Robben Island. Patients brought many exhibits, garden produce, fowls, eggs, and fruit.

Figure 3: Male ‘Leper’ Band, Robben Island, undated
Courtesy of the Western Cape Archives and Records Service

77 Fish visited a man; ‘Jas M’ who he assumed had become cold with life. He (the patient) however, was still attending birthday parties of his fellow ‘lepers’ because he played a piano. See Fish, Robben Island: The Home of the Leper, 93.
The women also showcased their knitting needlework. Christmas was the best time for people with leprosy. It was the time to share the love of friends and family. The shop on the Island stocked different items and was busy during this time. Each patient received a little gift. Christmas was a time where photographers came to take pictures of them. They sang all their favorite hymns. To be in touch with the outside world during Christmas meant everything to them.

It is noted that the story of people with leprosy has two diverse faces. There is a contradiction with the complexity of their lives. One side of their story is grim as a result of stigmatization which makes them have a desire to long for home. To achieve this, they resist bravely and heroically against the authorities. On the other side, others held on to the life on the Island and formed social bonds that helped them to survive because they were uncertain of what would become of them on the mainland. But how do we engage with these diverse images regarding the lives of people with leprosy on Robben Island: bands, games, intimate relationships, stigmatization and resistance against authorities?
For a long time, Robben Island Museum has been criticised for solely putting more focusing on the political imprisonment narrative and more particularly on Nelson Mandela’s life history as a post-apartheid leader. Some scholars have dubbed this representation the ‘Mandelalisation’ of Robben Island in which the understanding of the Museum and the history and experience of political imprisonment and the liberation struggle in South African is understood in terms of the image of one man and icon, Mandela. Some institutions magnify Mandela and have used his name and image as a brand for political and economic gains or ‘commercialization’. This representation has silenced the memory and role of other figures and groups that contributed to the history of the country.

In this chapter I discuss the making and the content of the exhibition entitled *I want to go home!* *Leprosy on Robben Island* which is mounted at Nelson Mandela Gateway (NMG). The selection of this space was a deliberate attempt to interrupt the ‘mandelaised’ image for which the gateway is known. From a common eye, one may think Robben Island Museum through NMG exhibits has used Mandela’s image as a brand. From its branding, one may have an idea of what to expect on the Island – the imprisonment of Mandela. Right under this name, there is a blown up image of Mandela in sunglasses. A gift shop inside NMG has a Mandela sculpture outside and most of the shop’s products are branded ‘Mandela’. It is also noted that Nelson Mandela’s photos at NMG are more visible unlike photos of his fellow comrades. These photos are highly symbolic and plant in the minds of the populace a compromised and invented story about the experiences of Robben Island.

Though Robben Island served as a political prison for renowned figures like Mandela, one could argue that the leprosy patients who were banished there by the colonial government were also ‘imprisoned’ for almost a century. Therefore, this exhibition should be seen as an intervention to tell this story to the wider public considering that none of the leprosy patients

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is still alive, only the descendants. The exhibition draws on their collective voice in exploring the complex issues that transpired as a result of their social separation. In addition, it seeks to provide an alternative and more diverse and varied narrative of the history of Robben Island.

**Initial Planning: Breaking Ground**

On 10 March, 2014 I had the opportunity to visit Robben Island as a student in the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies. As we were taken around the sites on the Island, I became interested in the story of the people who were segregated on the Island as a result of their medical condition, amongst them the leprosy patients. I was astonished to see a vast open space with tombstones and shale stones hidden under bushes. I could not stop imagining how many people were buried here. I later learnt that it was a cemetery for people who suffered from leprosy. They were buried far from the rest of the community’s burial grounds, considering that their condition was regarded contagious. Even after death, it was feared that the germs from their dead bodies could somehow ‘contaminate’ the ‘healthy’ people.

![Figure 4: Graveyard for people with leprosy, Robben Island, undated](image)

Courtesy of Robben Island Museum

The tour guide later showed us the church built by the male leprosy patients. He emphasized that male and female patients were separated in the belief that leprosy was hereditary. He did not mention that there were children born during this period. I found a report of a 2006
conference where a group of those who suffered from leprosy, most of them who were at a point banished from society came to meet under one roof at Robben Island. The conference was mainly to reclaim their identities in the era of HIV/AIDS. This motivated me to get more insight into the complex story of the leprosy patients as I noticed that the story that has been ‘over narrated’ is the political imprisonment story. I realised that there was more to their story apart from the issue of control and race. However, I began to wonder whether I would, in fact, be able to recover this story given the limited archival evidence. I deduced that the reason the leprosy narrative is silent it is because it does not fall entirely into the wider representation of Robben Island Museum’s slogan of the ‘triumph of the human spirit over adversity’. It is difficult to see any triumph in this case, state-endorsed banishment, isolation and incarceration. I deduced that the idea of banishment could be linked to how the colonial government was in the process of ‘making a nation’. Banishing the patients was a way of creating a ‘nation’ without the sick and the ‘undesirables’.

I Want to Go Home! Leprosy On Robben Island Exhibition

The exhibition I want to go home! Leprosy on Robben Island is a curatorial project where I seek to commemorate the human experiences of people with leprosy who fall largely outside the mainstream historical narratives, but whose resistance to banishment and mistreatment was nonetheless brave and heroic. Their major achievement was rising above their circumstances, against the odds in ‘exile’. They should be remembered. Themes of the exhibition include the notion of social death, the treatment of people with leprosy on the Island, and their resistance, survival strategies and legacies.

Making this exhibition involved many processes particularly in relation to space (the display area), research, design and layout, selection and production of graphics and objects for display. It also looked at the target audience for the exhibition, content or themes, and the schedule (timeframe). After framing an idea of the exhibition itself, it was ideal to look at the exhibition space which forms a crucial aspect. According to Raymond Montpetit (1995), one of the first conditions to be considered for an exhibition to be organised is the issue of space. He argues that an exhibition is a ‘spatial phenomenon’, ‘a place where people go to follow a circuit’. Montpetit asserts that an exhibition ‘spatializes meaning for the visitor, by means of
the material objects brought together and displayed.’ A space for the exhibition was made available at the Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island at the Waterfront.

Thousands of patients used the Waterfront, particularly Jetty 1 as their embarkation point to Robben Island. This relationship with the space which marks the beginnings of their journey makes the space significant. In addition, their descendants use this space when they go to the Island to pay homage to their ancestors. I also felt the space is important because if Robben Island is a place where the history of imprisonment should be presented, the story of leprosy as another kind of ‘imprisonment’ ought to be given a space here. Robben Island itself is a site of meaning since it is where people with leprosy were banished. This was the space in which some patients claimed to have suffered and dehumanized.

Leprosy accounts at Robben Island can be linked to the notion of ‘silence’. There is less tangible data from the memories of people in the period. Implicitly, I began to realise that the process of curation and the process of research go together and are inextricably interlinked. Archival understanding provided a guide for the selection of images that fitted into the narrative. However, most archival images were of very bad quality, considering the time that has passed by since they were taken. Realising the importance of these images in the interpretation of this story of ‘silence’, I opted to deploy graphic design elements on them. This was done to add an effect to the images, to enable them be more ‘visible’ in the exhibition. The selection of images also went hand in hand with the selection of the colour theme for the exhibition. Upon reflecting on the empty space of the display area that I was allocated, on the second floor leftwing, I realised it metaphorically portrayed the idea of ‘isolation’. For that reason, it took me a lot of time to decide on the colour which could convey a sense of ‘emptiness of life on the Island’ and ‘the isolation of patients’. In the end, I settled for blue and grey which blended in well with my archival images as the colours did not distract the audience’s attention from the images; grey also conveys a sense of monotony, sameness, the ‘social death’ which I have referred to in chapter two.

Retelling this story of leprosy also had limitations as regards sourcing three dimensional objects and works of art to supplement the narrative of the exhibition. This is because everything that the patients were in contact with was burnt to ashes to prevent the transmission of the disease to the mainland. According to Henrietta Lidchi, museums do not deal ‘solely with objects, but more importantly with… ideas – notions of what the world is or should be… They generate representations and attribute value and meaning in line with certain perspectives or classificatory schemes which are historically specific’. I echo Lidchi’s idea that an exhibition is not merely about the objects, their originality, but the meaning and representation of ideas created around the narrative. For this reason, a curatorial decision was made that I source and showcase objects, merely for representation of the context of nineteenth century accounts framed by the archival readings. I depended more on the leprosy patients’ testimonies to recreate and construct a narrative of the history of leprosy.

The ‘Leper Bell’ and Other Items

In order to bridge the ideas of the past and contemporary representations of leprosy heritage, I depended on recreating scenes from objects of recent past. I used my own imagination of the space to make meaning and connect with the experiences of people with leprosy. As people with leprosy were being banished to Robben Island, they were told they would return home after receiving medical care. Little did they know that they had embarked on a journey of no return. They carried all their possessions with them, amongst them were books, clothes, kitchen utensils and games. On the other hand, as the patients longed to go back home after realising that this was not the life they were promised, they imagined a returned journey. To depict this sense of movement, I conceptualised a journey and found a number of suitcases with items to complement them. The suitcases have a powerful representation of an attitude to life on the Island. It gives a coherent voice to their perceptions of banishment.

As I was walking around in Milnerton flea market, in Cape Town, in search for items, I found an old bell. I got fond of the motif on the bell which I deduced was a woman in Victorian attire. Her hair was covered with a headgear. She carried a bag in one hand and a bell in the

other. Behind the motif, was a reference number: 7-3-5-9-7-5. With keen interest, I typed the number on the screen of my computer. To my great excitement, I established that this was a ‘leper’ bell which was used in the early nineteenth century in England. People with leprosy carried bells or wooden clappers to warn people of their approach since they were regarded as the ‘unclean’. Other societies with histories of slavery, like Kalaupapa in Brazil, the community members were responsible for ringing the bell to warn ‘healthy’ people that ‘lepers’ were approaching. The bell is a powerful symbolic object in the exhibition and the centre of understanding how leprosy heritage still lives on and its legacy of segregation and exclusion.

The exhibition I want to go home! Leprosy on Robben Island opens with an interaction. Visitors are welcomed into the display space with a blue banner that contains the title of the exhibition. It features a stamp that was created specifically for this exhibition and a Robben Island map of 1854 showing ‘leper settlement’ areas. These provide an idea to the visitor of the content of the exhibition with the text that accompanies it. The title ‘I want to go home’ has been drawn from my reading of the collective voice of people with leprosy and invokes a sense of their repeated expressions of longing for home, as life on the Island proved to be challenging without their families and friends from the mainland. I open by introducing Robben Island as an exile settlement for the ‘undesirables’ of society. I give a hint that obnoxious laws and acts of segregation had begun to emerge in South Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that were in support of the segregation of leprosy patients. This shows that the state helped to create prejudice among its own citizens.

On the glass wall in the exhibition space, next to this introductory banner, is an extract from the archives: the voice of a person with leprosy who spoke explicitly on the conditions of Robben Island. The voice supports the title of the exhibition and gives a sense of urgency of the many reasons that the patients had for wanting to go home.

Apart from the introductory banner, the exhibition has five other banners that run in sequence with carefully selected images from the archives to suit the narrative. These banners are entitled: Social Death, Gate of Tears, The Strength of the Infirm, Community and Legacies respectively. All the images were retouched considering their poor quality. The banner that follows immediately after the introduction is an extension of the idea that leprosy patients were banished to Robben Island after the implementation of certain laws. This grey banner
has an image of the ‘Leper Repression Act 1892’ that was specifically created for the purposes of this exhibition. I retrieved some sentences from the Act and merged them with a Parliament clerk’s hammer, sourced elsewhere as a symbol of affirmation that the law had been passed. According to Foucault’s law as cited by Cohen and Taylor, ‘sites of power are also sites for resistance.’ The implementation of these laws was marked by resistance from the patients, particularly in 1892, which in turn triggered some transformations in their living conditions on the Island. It became difficult for patients to meet their families. There was a decline in the quality of food and medical care. Patients were literally starved, policed and detained within their compounds. In addition, they were chained and beaten by the medical personnel. To visualise this component of the protest, the exhibition has used an illustration of men with leprosy, created by the author, to represent the various ways in which they stood up against their authorities. In addition, I selected an image of a ‘leper’ boat to portray how they attempted to escape.

![Image of a food protest, 2014](image)

**Figure 5: An illustration of a food protest, 2014**

Though they longed to go home, the patients made a community on their own by learning to survive. They came from different backgrounds. They shared skills, organised letter-writing classes to provide a means of communicating with their families and friends among other things. This collection of experiences is presented visually on a banner by showing a ‘leper male band’ which entertained their ‘imagined community’. An ‘imagined community’,

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according to Benedict, is a socially constructed community where members believe in belonging to a certain group of people (in his analysis of nation). They give themselves positions and a certain identity. Likewise, members in this community perceived themselves as a unified entity.\textsuperscript{83}

It should be noted that during the twentieth century, a colonized body was usually used as a subject of study. I came across an image in the archives of a woman with leprosy on Robben Island. The way the photograph was taken, the sadness on her face, the shadow of the photographer, portrayed a certain stereotype of her ‘condition’. One may argue that the focus was not on the woman as a person, but it was on her medical condition. However, the photograph attempted to show a romanticized image of a woman rather than the situation on the ground; that women generally were unhappy with their life in exile. The exhibition used this portrait. It is one of the few surviving images of women on the Island. It is has been mounted directly opposite the array of five thematic banners together with the other five forex prints. These prints are portraits of people with leprosy, handicraft made by a woman with leprosy, and the archival voices.

Right at the centre of the exhibition space, there are selected items including the ‘leper bells’, travel case, doily piece, walking stick and eating utensils displayed in the glass case. As part of the curatorial efforts to present the story of leprosy, an informed decision was made to supplement this story by recreating a section of the General Asylum at Robben Island. This is an installation which is specifically focused on the female ‘leper’ ward in the early twentieth century. The hospital admitted more than four thousand leprosy patients. By looking at its significance and realising that the story of leprosy on the Island revolves around this hospital, it was ideal to incorporate it in this space of knowledge production. The items in the ward include buckets, stools or benches, blankets and many others.

Figure 6: A section of a ward of this sort was recreated in the exhibition space. This photo was taken in the early 20th century- a female ‘leper’ ward

*I want to go home! Leprosy on Robben Island* attempts to convey something of the complexity of the lives of people with leprosy and to give a general idea to the public of their experiences. Some may have expected the exhibition to take place on Robben Island to create awareness around the topic on that space. However, the decision to use Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island was a deliberate attempt to highlight the histories of the beginnings of their journey to the ‘unknown Island’, the journey of no return, and to also disrupt the ‘mandelaised’ narrative at the space. People with leprosy suffered discrimination and their lives radically changed upon their banishment to the Island. Some accepted their fate of dying on the Island, while others pressed on and echoed in a loud voice of their desire to return home. *I want to go home! Leprosy on Robben Island* is a ‘memorialization’ and a ‘commemoration’ of the thousands of lives and stories which this exhibition recalls. It is a contribution to the production and presentation of knowledge.
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TRANSFORMING THE MUSEUM IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA: THE CASE OF IZIKO’S NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, PRESSURE, CHANGE, RESISTANCE AND PROMISED CHANGE

by

LUVUYO NDZUZO

This essay deals with the transformation process of the Ethnography Gallery of Southern Africa in Iziko Natural History/Science museum called the South African Museum. I will argue that the Ethnography Gallery undergoes a transformation process from displaying people seen as lowest in the human evolution rung as advocated by Darwinism, and the sciences that go along with it, to the complete eradication of such depiction. The essay attempts to question “the imagined sanctity of science and of museums” and the notion of a divide between natural and cultural by invoking critical heritage scholarship that challenges such a notion. I will argue that there is no such divide and will use the example of the South African Museum to show that museums of Natural History/Science are cultural constructs. The post apartheid state, critical heritage scholarship and critical citizens wrestle curatorial authority and open up the museum to catapult its transformation.

The South African Museum (Natural History Science Museum) of Iziko Museum of South Africa settles in the seat of power in a beautiful part of Cape Town, a tranquil environment surrounded by notable landmarks that connect history, power and wealth. It is a magnificent white building with strong Georgian architectural features, situated in the beautiful company gardens near the two houses of national parliament; general assembly and the national council of provinces, and the office of the state president of South Africa. In the surroundings are also the Jewish museum, the holocaust centre, two high schools, a five-star hotel, consulate offices, land bank the high court and a cathedral, to name but a few. All of which were previous reserved for the privileged whites for many years before the dawn of the post apartheid state.

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For centuries this geographical position of the museum has had close associations with power/knowledge regimes from the seventeenth century after the establishment of the refreshment station by the Dutch. Since 1825 it took its position as an institution that contributes to ways of knowing and the authority they offer. It is a long standing and respectable institution whose good name is known by many in the country and around the world for imparting knowledge about nature. The museum boasts three floors of galleries with permanent exhibitions, ranging from the huge collection of the shark world/world of water, mammals, reptiles, fossils, planetarium, human evolution, rock art and the ethnographic gallery. Its collections have been carefully selected to display a wonderful world of nature and how it is connected to humans.

The museum broacher describes this natural history/science museum as a rich resource with a huge collection of natural specimens. “Over a million and a half specimens are collected in this, the country’s oldest museum, dating back to 1825. From the Victorian-era animal displays and 700 million-year-old fossils, to authentic, life-size whale skeletons suspended from the ceiling, the museum is a portal to the natural world”. The extent of the collection overlaps the natural divide into human beings as part of nature. The broacher continues “[e]xtensive social history exhibits shed light on the ethnographic intricacies of indigenous southern African cultures, unravelling the mysteries of rock art symbolism and san rituals. Others vividly showcase the nuances of tribal costuming and ancient ways of life that have survived centuries of outside influence.” The broacher makes the connection between animal specimens and collected cultural life in a way that is likely to induce the desire to know more about the displayed collections.

To the visitor the displayed collections have a potential to help educate the public about the wide ranging animal species, their beauty similarities and peculiarities. It serves as a platform to represent and parade the wonders of nature, their importance and their interconnectedness. The state of conservation of these specimens also play a role in the public showing appreciation for the disciplines that study and conserve nature and also accord respect to the

85 Iziko guide: explore your museums (broacher), (Cape Town: Iziko Museums, 2014),
86 The international broadcasting channel Discovery Satellite Television has been advertising its powerful audio visual bird life collection that gets hosted by the South African Museum for two summers (2012 and 2013) in succession.
museum for its preservation and conservation function. A visit to this museum has an impressive impact on the visitor and imprints an indelible mark in how one understands nature, a changing of attitude about nature and awakens the love for nature and increases the likelihood of caring about nature. As a disciplinary institution, it gets the respect of the public for taking care of such a huge collection but more than that it keeps the collections for future generations. The public finds itself educated without being in a classroom.

Iziko natural history/science museum, its displays and staff play a significant role in collecting, classifying, preserving and conserving the collections and teaching the public about nature. Its position as an institution of learning emanates from the scientific protocols; procedures and decisions of selection that give value to the work that create displays. In this regard scientists collect specimens for a profound contribution to the study of nature. More so, preserving specimens for future generations is an even more significant labour that calls for careful considerations. That animals must be classified, skinned, their parts sorted, and treated to prevent decay require special scientific skills and common care procedures. This behind the scenes work, in preparation for a good state of conservation and the display of collections where scientists and ordinary museum workers prepare to educate the public about nature through displays, is central to the life of the museum.

Collecting, classifying, preservation, and display and routine care all happens away from the gaze of the visitor. Likewise, it is perceived that scientific work at Iziko natural history/science Museum contributes to the many galleries that are found in the building in the company gardens. As indicated, William Henry Flower in the “Museum Organisation. – Presidential Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Newcastle-On-Tyne Meeting, 11th September 1889”:

What a museum really depends upon for success and usefulness is not its building, not its cases, not even its specimens, but its curator. He and his staff are the life and soul of the institution, upon whom its whole value depends; and yet in many – I may not say most of our museums – they are the last to be thought of. The care, the preservation, the naming of the specimens are either left to voluntary effort …

grievously under salaried and consequently uneducated official is expected to keep in

order, to clean, dust, arrange, name, and display in a manner which will contribute to
the advancement of scientific knowledge, collections ranging in extent over almost
every branch of human learning, from the contents of an ancient British barrow to the
last discovered bird of paradise from New Guinea.88

The museum’s “Ethnography Gallery: Southern Africa” has dim lights and displays material
cultural objects from the region. It is a gallery that displays objects, images and text, mostly
in glass cases, and seek to depict cultural life as led by the black people of the region. The
cultural objects tell a powerful story of how people live in a cultural setting in the period
before modernity or in modern times but in remote rural areas. An imposing but slowly
fading image of Shaka, the Zulu king is in the display; soon after turning left as you enter the
gallery, and it tells a story about the Zulu monarch and Zulu life in general. The visitor
continues from Shaka towards the right while facing Shaka going deeper into the gallery are
the following eye catching installations; a Nama hut with a white goat in front of the door,
traditionally dressed Xhosa women, an image of the ruins of great Zimbabwe and an image of
the life casts. The casts that once brought the museum under pressure in the 1990’s from
politicians, critical visitors, heritage activists and critical heritage scholars alike.

Depicting a subtle response to the pressure of the 1990s the museum installed a text panel at
the entrance of the ethnography gallery called “Without and within time: recovering history
in the Ethnography Gallery – the Natives’ Land Act of 1913 in South Africa”. This
installation, taking into account the centenary of the Land Act of 1913 in 2013, gives a brief
background of the displays found inside the gallery. It speaks to the transformation process
through which the gallery has gone.

The exhibition in this Gallery was installed in the early 1970s, and shows aspects of
the rich material culture of indigenous southern Africans. Groupings were defined by
cultural patterns and language. Generalizations of what constituted a cultural group
were also used in Apartheid policies to impose fixed notions of ethnicity. The objects
exhibited date mostly from the first half of the 20th century, yet most of the displays
present cultural patterns with no historical dimension as if they were static and

88 William Henry Flower, ‘museum Organisation. – Presidential Address to the British Association for the
timeless. The displays suggest that people have lived like this from time immemorial and still continue to do so. Strikingly apparent absences include forms of contact arising from the arrival of colonizing people and also from among Africans. Land dispossession of the indigenous people had taken place since the first arrival of the Dutch at the Cape and later by British in the further interior. 

The caption goes on to state the position of the museum about the future of the exhibition found in the ‘Ethnography Gallery: Southern Africa.

“This exhibition is to be dismantled during the next few years, but we have made a few interventions on the questions of history, land, conflict and resistance in order to mark the centenary of the passing of the Natives’ Land Act of 1913”.

Inside the Gallery, indeed, there are depictions of the 1913 Land Act protest proponents that speak to history, cultural objects associated with African life, positioning it as primitive and ‘timeless’. These include stoneware, weaved grass products, carved wooden and pottery utensils for domestic work, beadwork for decorative wear, hide shields, spears and knobkerries as weaponry, mud houses and Nama huts for housing. Clothing is a mix of grass, clothe and animal skins, corn is shown as the main food supply. Interestingly, there are new panels like “Iets uit niets – Jan Schoeman (OutaLaapies), c. 1920-2011, Great Zimbabwe, two panels of “Erasure? Out of sight, Out of Mind” and “Marking the Natives’ Land Act of 1913”. These depictions of a people locked in time and people that participate in making history offer an opportunity for visitors to learn through reading and observation.

School children and their educators enjoy gazing and reading the displays in the gallery. They also take pictures in front of displays of their choice. I have observed that children like taking pictures in front of the Nama hut with a white goat. While female educators like to be pictured in front of the traditionally dressed figures. The educators make comments about being reminded of village life which induces a desire to go back to a tranquil and peaceful village life. Children get excited by the sight of the goat and the hut, separated by clear glass which seems to give an impression of direct access to the objects. This seems to create an impression that the depicted life is real and reachable. Children come close to the display and

89 First information panel at the entrance of the Ethnography Gallery in Iziko Natural History Museum
touch the glass inviting the “do not touch” comments from educators and museum workers alike.

But a closer look at the “Erasure? Out of Sight, Out of Mind” panels show images of the bushman diorama. This diorama has life casts depicting the life of bushman, a group thought to be close to extinction at the time of creating life casts.90 The diorama has a powerful visual impact. It creates a picture of real life activities of hunter gatherers captured in time and preserved in glass cases. The life size casts contribute to the idea of “realism” as an important of museum practice. In the same vein the text in the panels draw our attention to the process of the cast project, the motivation of the museum to do the casts and who was involved. Carefully read, the panels suggest a shift in presentation and representation of cultures and they also communicate policy positions about the displays in the gallery. Some of the text in the panels read as follows:

Life casts of indigenous South African people featured in many of the displays in this gallery until they were removed and placed in storage in August 2013. In 1906 the Director of the South African Museum, Dr. Louis Peringuey, initiated a project to make life-casts of ‘aboriginals of the Bush and Hottentot Races’ as part of a study of race and evolution. Between 1907 and 1924 over 60 plaster-of Paris casts of living men, women and children were made by the museum taxidermist, James Drury. He visited the Northern Cape, Namibia and Botswana to find what were believed to be the ‘racially pure’ models. Some of the people were hunter-gatherers, herders or labourers, whom he had to persuade to be cast but others, were convicts who had no choice.91

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In the mid-1990s the museum came under pressure from politicians, critical heritage scholars, heritage activist and critical visitors. Contrary to what Henry Flower suggests about the importance of the curator in determining the direction of the museum these critical entities became a voice that calls for the transformation of the museum. By so doing they were wrestling “curatorial authority” from the grip of the scientists. A strong and unequivocal message for the transformation of the museum, based on the criticism of cultural presentation and representation in the natural history/science museum was openly communicated. However, scientists and some tour operators opposed the transformation agenda, their voice was based on what international tourism demanded see at the museum. The aesthetic nature of the diorama was particularly stated; here the emphasis was on the exoticism of the display.

The refusal of tourist operators and scientists to transform the museum displays seem to stem from the aesthetics of the diorama form a philosophical angle and the refusal to relinquish authority over the objects by the curators. This seems to be the politics of curatorial authority and the idea of heritage being uncontested or unquestionable. However, Tony Bennett suggests that museum transformation has been part and parcel of the museum and it is based on two key issues. “The principle of public rights sustaining the demand that museums should be equally open and accessible to all and the principle of representational adequacy sustaining the demand that museums should adequately represent the cultures and values of different sections of the public”

Thus confusion erupts in the museum when it must transform, because there is a mismatch between the idea the it becomes a democratic museum but it is also a tool that drive popular education to change and order the public.

The association between museums and sets of knowledge like geology, biology, archaeology, anthropology, history and art history is centralized in how their direct involvement shape museuological practice. Each with a particular role to play in the museum and also arrange

95 Ibid, pp 90, 95-96
objects as parts of evolutionary sequences, Bennett argues that their involvement in the museum “formed a totalizing order of things and peoples”. The close association with sources of knowledge production processes solidifies notions of knowledge production authority. But he also suggests that the museum was hijacked by social ideologies like sexism by excluding women, racism by presenting the colonized people as at the lowest rungs of human evolution and elitist by presenting the wealthy as progressive. These social ideologies tend to clandestinely operate in the museum masked by realism which informs taxidermy for instance.

The natural history museum seems to present animals in real form such that the divide between life and death is transparent and almost nonexistent. Scholars agree that the natural history museum and the field of taxidermy are kept alive by the re-presentation of dead animals as alive. The taxidermist presents the animals in almost a perfect shape and beauty. Central to this re-presentation work is the combination of science and art which produces attractive heritage objects. Yet this recreational innovation is not easily detected by the ordinary visitor. It is the same one combined with careful and unambiguous labelling that is exploited to instruct the public manners. By “arranging a well-planned collection of instructive labels illustrated by well-selected specimens” visitors are ordered through the visual objects and are taught to mark their place in the order of things and people. At the same time natural history/ science museums put the veil of nature to hide the cultural underpinnings of natural history.

For the most part natural history museums present themselves as contributors and tributaries of science because their practice is informed by the scientific fields of study. For instance, “[d]irector of the South African Museum, Dr. Louis Peringuey, initiated a project to make life-casts of ‘aboriginals of the Bush and Hottentot Races’ as part of a study of race and evolution. Between 1907 and 1924 over 60 plaster-of Paris casts of living [people] were made by the museum taxidermist, James Drury” in the name of the Anthropological science.

This is an example why critical heritage scholars set out to break the barrier between culture and nature in the natural history museum displays. They do so by questioning the philosophical underpinnings of presentation and representation. They are suspicious of the driving theory behind museum displays especially that they formulate the mandate of museums particularly the natural history museums in their role to order publics through collecting and public education. Critical heritage scholars break the barrier between nature and culture by arguing that natural history is constructed to feed the agenda of the ruling classes. It is used to order the other classes to subordination.99

The exhibitionary strategy employed by Iziko Museum in the “Ethnography Gallery” resonates with the idea of visuality.100 A problematic term used from the 19th century for public representations of great men with a Christianity bias. Along with the training of the eye to see and quickly learn deeper lessons come the terms used by Tony Bennett drawing from Pitt Rivers and John Barry, “auto intelligible”, “those who run may read”. While these sound like inclusive terms, Bennett argues that they are condescending. The emphasis on vision connotes that their orientation is mechanical and does not have attention for detail or finer things in life.101 Bennett argues that museums emphasize on meticulously planning displays to train the eyes of the working class that visit museums to “rapidly understand by sight what would require pages or books”. So that the visitor can see a simple, unproblematic, “natural connections between things” to reinforce “the order of things” in the mind of the working class.102

The ‘democratic museum’ opened access to other classes, other than the ruling classes, enter the museum and learn from it. The granted access to the lower classes facilitates a learning process that emphasizes knowing their place in the order of things and people where they can use their prior knowledge to relate to the displayed objects. Equally, this access also extended


100 For a detailed discussion see; Nicholas Mirzoeff, ‘On Visuality’, *Journal of visual culture*, (London: SAGE Publications, 2006)


to the display of the lower classes inside the natural history/science museum displays, with particular focus on the populations of colonized territories. They were to be object lessons in the new scientific venture of “eugenics” and “evolution”. Like in the case of Botany and Zoology, anthropological scientists accorded themselves power and curatorial authority through their central role in the shaping of collecting and displaying people. It is against this background that Tony Bennett argues against the representation of populations in colonized territories being placed at the lowest rungs of human evolution.\(^\text{103}\)

The South African debate of the mid 1990’s among different interest groups started a process of engaging the museum, forcing it to open up; this debate relates to the representation of cultures and the presence of human remains in the South African Museum and other natural history museums. The most prominent of these voices is then President Nelson Mandela who, on Robben Island on 24 September 1997 while launching it as a national museum of the democratic dispensation, pointed out that “[o]f our museums, all but a handful - three per cent - represented the kind of heritage which glorified mainly white and colonial history. And even the small glimpse of black history in the others was largely fixed in the grip of racist and other stereotypes”. He goes on to say the new terrain affords them space to represent “history in a way that respects the heritage of all citizens”.\(^\text{104}\) It is this opportunity to engage with the public that Rassool sees as a “space of transaction” that produces transformation in the museum.\(^\text{105}\) Mandela’s speech is preceded by state attempts to transform the heritage landscape in South Africa through public engagement led by the Arts and Culture Task Team, one of the technologies of the state.\(^\text{106}\)

Scholars unequivocally argue for the transformation of natural history/science museums, particularly their strong grip on knowledge/power relations through curatorial authority. According to Tony Bennett the public museum marked early forms of transformation by appropriating its notion of arbitrary power from the royals, aristocrats, and the church, into a...


\(^{104}\) Nelson Mandela, ‘Address by President Nelson Mandela on Heritage Day; Robben Island’, (Cape Town: 24 September 1997)


\(^{106}\) Report of the Arts and Culture Task Group”, Presented to the South African Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, (Pretoria: Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1995.)
tool that can be used to educate citizens “to serve the collective good of the state”. 107 Making a case for the representation of popular culture in museums Kevin Moore argues that museums should transform and remove unpopular representations. 108 While Gerard Corsane argues that the policies of the post-apartheid state influence the needed transformation of the heritage and museum management landscape in South Africa. 109 The council of Iziko Museums of Cape Town responded to the transformation challenge by formulating a policy statement on the management of human remains in its collection. It defined them as “complete human skeletons, partial human skeletons or isolated human skeletal elements and soft human tissue”. 110 The policy makes room for a rethink about the existence of human remains in the museum collection.

In the absence of a national policy on the management of human remains, Iziko museums council took a bold step that pioneers the removal of human remains in its collections. The soft human tissue for instance relates to life casts that critical heritage scholars, heritage activists and politicians spoke against. This unsettled museum authority and brought in the politics of knowledge/power relations between the curators and the public. Iziko museums of South Africa intentionally disrupted the Ethnography Gallery of Southern Africa by removing the bushman diorama completely, removing all casts and replace them with mesh wire that took the shape of people, and also replace the diorama with two panels that speak to the process of making life casts and the diorama. This disruption in the display is accompanied by the introduction of historicizing the Native Land Act of 1913.

Such curatorial intervention links with ideas of leading critical heritage scholars like Mark Dion, W J T Mitchell, Bruce whose work questions the taxidermy that is accompanied by glass cases and the “do not touch label”. 111 Iziko museums make serious and bold decisions

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110 Iziko Museums, Policy on the management of human remains in Iziko collections, (Cape Town: Iziko Museums, 2005)
about human remains that have a huge implication in its curatorial authority and the field of science that influenced their introduction. There still remains an issue of further transformation in the museum; that of displaying African cultures in a natural history museum instead of a social history museum. This question of displaying cultures in natural history halls speaks to the techniques of display like juxtaposition. Juxtaposition has a tendency of undermining transformation efforts, knowingly or unknowingly because it speaks to the overall message that is conveyed in the museum.\textsuperscript{112}

My assessment of the Ethnography Gallery shows good progress in the transformation South African Museum moving away from the grip of discredited science, racial science to be specific. It opens itself to become “a space of transaction” that allows other forms of knowledge to interact with it so as to foster transformation through public engagements. The state, critical heritage scholars, the critical visitor and critical citizens interact with the museum. “The teddy bear tendency” persists in the form of Peter Fleck who donated his taxidermized animal collection to the museum in 2013.\textsuperscript{113} But a robust debate ensued led by Leslie Witz and Pippa Skotes both are critical heritage scholar. Fleck symbolizes the privileged white hunter whose hunting expeditions feeds into the narrative of great men in the Victorian age.\textsuperscript{114} I find that critical scholars, critical citizens and politicians successfully engage the museum to question its curatorial authority. In return the museum responds by allowing itself to be “a space of transaction” and embarks on “curatorial interventions” like disrupting the narrative as well as removing the diorama and other displays with human remains in the displays. I also find that display philosophies are maintained because the changes achieve less in altering the overall message of the museum than the display technique of juxtaposition.

\textsuperscript{112} Corinne Kratz, \textit{The Ones that Are Wanted: Communication and the Politics of Representation in a Photographic exhibition} (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 2002).


\textsuperscript{114} A symposium held at South African Museum in 2013 marking the donation of the Peter Fleck collection chaired by Ciraj Rassool.
I conclude by saying the essay shows that public engagement between the museum and its audiences accounts for the museum’s transformation and that it did not flow from the bank of “scientific facts” that ordain its all knowing attitude. It is a process that leads to an “uncertain future for racial science and the Natural History/Science museum as we know it”\textsuperscript{115}. Here science, the scientist and the authority of the museum in knowledge/power relations is questioned and their position is unsettled. The essay attempts to lift the imagined veil of sanctity of science and museums. It questions and “explores the political nature, uses and consequences of representations” of natural history/science museums. Again it attempts to investigate the idea of natural history/science and its association with “cultural production and knowledge” at a capillary level. I argue that the South African Museum and its Ethnography Gallery was used to fix curatorial authority on objects, feed racial science and actively participated in making reality the racist apartheid state agenda, all of which is challenge in the post-apartheid discourse. The museum evoked curatorial interventions by disrupting the Gallery installations, adding text and process in the gallery. It also historicized the Gallery by adding the 1913 Land Act and “the Erasure?” as examples. However, I argue that if the museum wants to resolve the issue it can exhibit Southern African cultures in a social history museum and invoke Nelson Mandela’s words of representing people’s heritage in a dignified way. I argue that the museum should be actively involved in its community to create a people’s university through direct engagement that is void of condescending attitudes. So as to create an environment of people feeling at home once they visit.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} Ciraj Rassool, Class discussion, Center for Humanities Research, Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, 2014).

\textsuperscript{116} Nick Merriman, Beyond the glass case: The past, the heritage and the public, (London: University College London, 2000), pp 1-5
References


Rasool C. S., Class discussion, Center for Humanities Research, Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, 2014).
INTRODUCTION

The Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum (LMLM) is housed in the Old Community Hall and in Hostel 33 in Lwandle community which is about 40km outside of Cape Town city centre. The museum commemorates the system of migrant labour, single-sex hostels and the control of black workers through the infamous pass book- an identity document which controlled access to employment and residence in urban areas\textsuperscript{117}.

While much of the focus of the museum is on the historical aspects of the migrant labour system in South Africa and it narrates this story through the sit-specific conditions in Lwandle’s compound, it also, significantly, seeks to address contemporary issues around housing in the post-apartheid city. Over the last years there has been substantial media coverage around questions of the under provision of service delivery and issues of housing and the ways in which these might represent a continuity with earlier forms of inadequate planning and design in the post-apartheid city of Cape Town.

This study sets out to look at specific manifestations and experiences of housing in Lwandle. Lwandle was established in 1958 when the previous owner of the land Mr C.P. J VanVuuren sold the land to the South African Government\textsuperscript{118}. It was designed to be invisible\textsuperscript{119}, with hostel type accommodation for workers who mainly serviced the nearby fruit and canning industry\textsuperscript{120}. These hostels were meant for single men only, who were coming to work in the city for a short period of time and who would have to go back to the then ‘Home lands’ Transkei and Ciskei. According to the laws and regulations set by the apartheid government


\textsuperscript{118}Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum Archives


\textsuperscript{120}Witz, ‘Transforming Museums on Postapartheid Tourist Rotes’, 2006, pp123
at the time, no women and children were allowed on the hostels; as a result, the hostels of Lwandle were referred to by many as the ‘bachelors’ hostels’.

![Ariel photograph of Lwandle. Source: Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum archive](image)

Figure 1: Ariel photograph of Lwandle. Source: Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum archive

After South Africa went through a political change in 1994 and when democracy came, a lot of ‘Reconstruction and Development Programmes’ took place led by the peoples’ government; of the African National Congress (ANC). The Hostels to Home Project, which began in Lwandle around 1997, became a driving force for the establishment of the Lwandle Museum. Charmian Plummer, a Somerset West resident who had done some volunteer work at Lwandle felt that there should be at least one hostel preserved in order to memorialize and educate people on how the system of Apartheid had operated. She and Bongani Mgijima, a resident of Lwandle and a graduate of the Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies at the University of the Western Cape, founded and established a museum on the basis of a preserved hostel. They later acquired the Old Community Hall that currently houses the museum’s main exhibitions and on the 1st of May 2000 the Museum opened officially with its first exhibition “Memorising Migrancy” and “Raising the curtain”.

121 Witz, ‘Transforming Museums on Postapartheid Tourist Rotes’, 2006, pp124
AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research paper is to investigate and document the role of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum in the various stages in which the residents of Lwandle constitute themselves and how they have been constituted as a community. My main focus is to locate the moments of the formation of Lwandle as a community, the moments of liberation and the hostels to home project which secured future development of Lwandle. I explored how the museum relates with its various publics, especially since the museum is a community based museum and the first township based museum in the Western Cape bearing in mind that the notion of community is a complex one and that Lwandle has no single community, communities in Lwandle have been mobilised at various stages around housing development etc, and that the museum has worked with different communities at the various stages of its own development. The interesting thing about all this is that notions of community have shifted over time and through these moments.

Witz and Murray argue that the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum makes the community and in return the community makes the museum. I will look at what developments happened (e.g. housing/ urban planning) and their various stages and moments, in which they unfolded and manifested, what this did to the museum and its own growth – and what developments in the museum did to Lwandle communities in return. I will also look at what the Hostels to Homes Project and the communities mobilised around this project, did to the museum’s efforts to incorporate Hostel 33, what these contesting communities (a small pro- museum community and a counter-museum community) did to the direction the museum was taking at the time, what the response of the museum did to interested communities, and what notions of community emerged at that stage. Through the museum’s collection programmes, I will look at the communities that the museum might have made as it mobilised people around its memory projects (e.g. individuals or groups contacted or mobilised for the museum’s oral history projects, women mobilised around restoration of Hostel 33). I will look at how these groups have steered the directions of the museum and what notions of community did the museum construct during those moments.
My project seeks to understand the relationship between the making of Lwandle as a settled place, the making of the museum and the notions of community and how this has been made through urban planning and how the museum itself has been active in the making of community. Over the last ten years a small body of scholarship has emerged through the writings of museum staff, board members and academics. This emergent literature places Lwandle into the context of literature on public history, museum and memorialisation studies and urban planning and architectural conservation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the book by Karp et al; Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/ Global Transformations published in 2006, Leslie Witz wrote a chapter entitled ‘Transforming Museums on Post-Apartheid Tourist Routes’ where he talks about how the museum was established and its relations with the Lwandle Community. The exhibitions at the museum were designed in a way that would ensure engaging debates in the community around ways of remembering and remapping Lwandle. Witz does acknowledge that the museum has struggled with notions of community given that communities were created as part of a system of categorizing people by the apartheid government into smaller ethnic groups that were based on racial identities. The museum wanted to move away from these and create what Witz refers to as the spatial configuration of Lwandle and all its residents as its immediate community.

This idea of a museum was very new to the residents of Lwandle as they did not understand what this meant or how they could benefit from it. A lot of question came from the community some wanting to know why it was necessary to have a museum when the most ‘pressing issues were housing, employment, and health and education facilities’. It is this lack of understanding that led to the ‘protest’ of Lwandle resident on 1st of May when the museum was doing the official opening. At the door of Hostel 33 were a sign/ notice put up by residents of room 33 which read “We the residents of Room 33 decide to write this notice disagree with you about this room to be a museum. Firstly, give us accommodation before you can get this room. Thank you, from room 33”. A museum in Lwandle was seen as a place to entertain visitors and where school children would sometimes be taken to see what Witz

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calls ‘stuffed animals’, the community did not find any relation between them and the museum.

Mgijima and Buthelezi also mention this in their article published in JSAS. They speak of how Gqozo, a resident of Lwandle, would disturb the tour guide during a township walk with visitors and how he wanted to tell his side of the story claiming that the museum was not giving the visitor a true reflection of the history of Lwandle township and the experiences of the people of Lwandle. Mgijima and Buthelezi go into more detail on how the reactions were from the community regarding the first exhibition of the museum entitled “Memorising Migrancy” and what it meant to Lwandle.

CHAPTER ONE

This chapter focuses on the introduction of the Lwandle Museum and how Lwandle was developed as single sex hostels, the designed to be invisible hostel accommodation which had now turned into a community. This chapter looks at the notion of community and reviews what is meant by community. It asks; do the people in Lwandle see themselves as a Lwandle Community or Lwandle residents? Notions of development in Lwandle will be investigated. At the entrance of the museum the spatial evolution of Lwandle is shown aerial photographs. From the guided tours that I do at the museum as part of my museum practice the first thing people see is the evolution and chronology of Lwandle from when it was still a white owned farm by C. P. J. Van Vuuren in 1953 to the iconic design and layout of the migrant labour compound with one entrance which was police controlled in 1977 as shown in the aerial photographs, this was a sealed off compound designed to be invisible but yet people had no privacy in terms of ablution and bedding, they had no citizenship or agency in the city to the 2004 image of Lwandle with its associated surrounding areas.

The Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum is a museum in Lwandle that commemorates the Migrant Labour system in South Africa, more specifically in the Western Cape, South Africa. It was officially opened on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of May 2000 by Poet and resident of Lwandle, Sandile Dikeni. The museum is the first township based museum in the Western Cape and one of two museums in South Africa that speak of the issues of labour, the other being the Workers Museum in Johannesburg. Over the years the museum has received a number of awards including the Museum of the Year award from the Western Cape government in 2009 and Best Tourist Attraction award in 2008. In the current year of writing...
the museum has received two awards; the Director’s Award of Best Improvement in Cost per Visitor and the Michael M. Ames Award in Innovative Museum Anthropology.

Unlike other townships in the Western Cape and in South African, Lwandle was not designed to be a township but a single sex hostel that would accommodate workers coming from the Eastern Cape known as Transkei and Ciskei at the time. It was built in the centre of the Helderberg basin surrounded by what was called White Group Areas (the towns of Somerset West, Strand and Gordon’s Bay), it was not normal for a township to be built in the centre of the city normally they would be built in the outskirts of the city, so Lwandle was unique in that way and so it was referred to as the black spot of the Helderberg.

Figure 2: letters and reports of a proposed Native Location in Strand, courtesy of Lwandle Museum collection.

The first hostels were built in 1960 to accommodate 500 single men, I am saying single men because whether you were married or not, your family was not allowed to come and stay with you in the hostels, it was illegal for women and children to be in the hostels and so the hostels of Lwandle were referred to as the Bachelors’ Hostels. It was intended to consist of nothing more than a series of barrack-like structures, which would accommodate low paid male
labourers in the nearby industries, municipalities and farmlands

During the 1980s there were a lot of revolts that were happening all around South Africa against the apartheid regime. In 1986 we saw women sneaking into Lwandle; the space that was meant to accommodate 500 men was now occupied by 3000 people including women and children and so a case of overpopulation started to happen leading to the first informal settlements that were built called Umgababa.

The expansion of Lwandle into a community posed a threat to the white community of Strand as they started petitioning to have the residents of Lwandle evicted and sent to Khayelitsha on the cape flats. In the 1980s Lwandle had changed from being a place that provided for a regulated and controlled supply of labour into what was seen by residents of Strand as problematic and uncontrolled ‘social’ problem. An aerial photograph of Lwandle taken in the late 1980s shows that the buffer zone had become criss-crossed with multiple self-made paths as those who lived in Lwandle sought out the most convenient and easiest ways to traverse the routes to places of employment, residence and the surrounding towns.

![Aerial photograph of Lwandle showing the buffer zones. Courtesy of Leslie Witz](image)

In October 1986 the Strand Municipality passed a resolution calling for the residents of Lwandle to be removed to another area claiming that there was not enough family accommodation and that this was creating a social problem. It was said that the area was set aside for future development that would ensure more jobs for a number of white and

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126 N, Murray and L, Witz, ‘Hostels Homes Museum; Memorialising Migrant Labour pasts in Lwandle, South Africa’, UCT Press, 2014, pp1
127 N, Murray and L, Witz, ‘Hostels Homes Museum
128 N, Murray and L, Witz, ‘Hostels Homes Museum, pp95
coloured youth who were unemployed. When the residents of Lwandle did not move from the area, another recall was made by the Strand Municipality with the help of 350 Strand rate payers who circulated a petition among Strand residents objecting to any further development of family housing in Lwandle. The residents of Lwandle were only tolerated for their labour in the city but their presence was not tolerated.

In 1987 the Hostel Dwellers Association became an advocate for family housing and called upon family to be united through the provision for family housing. It became involved in a number of long negotiations until Lwandle became what Murray calls a site for experimentation and the implementation of new models of urban housing in post-apartheid South Africa. During democracy Lwandle was rescued from imminent demise and declared a township it also became one of the major sites to what was known as the Hostels-to-home project.

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter explores the making of the museum, how the museum seeks to critique the spatial formation of the migrant labour system through the compound and the hostel and through that wanting to be a community museum with ambition to represent the now settled community of Lwandle, taking ownership of its new home. It focuses on how the museum makes its community, how it selected certain families and people that come to represent community. It also includes the contests around the notion of community. Notion of home is inserted into the space.

The Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum has earned the title to call itself the first township based museum in the Western Cape as it is the only museum based in a township formerly created for the natives or Bantu speaking people. Lwandle itself being the historical site that used to be a dormitory area, the museum came to exist on the basis of a preserved hostel when all the single sex hostels were being demolished to make way for the Reconstruction and Development programme that was planning to change the hostels into family homes/units.

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129 N, Murray and L, Witz, ‘Hostels Homes Museum, pp95
130 L, Witz, ‘Museums, Histories and Dilemmas of Change in Post –Apartheid South Africa’, Working Papers in Museum Studies, number 3, University of Michigan, 2010, pp03
The Lwandle museum, a reminder of the migrant labour system, single sex hostel life, has struggled over the years to make a museum community\textsuperscript{131} as the residents of Lwandle struggled and some still struggle even today to find the value of the museum. In a survey that was done by Seelan Naidoo most of the response he got was that the museum was mainly for tourists and researcher and did not have an immediate connection and value with the residents of Lwandle especially young people who viewed the museum as a place that stores old things from the past. The biggest fight or conflict was the establishment of the museum while people had more pressing issues to deal with, like the lack of employment and housing\textsuperscript{132}, they did not see how having a museum in a township would be of value to them as the residents.

For Witz and Murray one of the major questions about the future if the museum was about “the struggle for development, constructing an institution that strives to create a questioning public citizenry by recalling the memories of apartheid, while at the same time being constrained by the cultural and structural legacies of a system that established Lwandle in 1958 for people who were cast as migrant labourers and whose home was represented as an ethnically designated ‘Xhosa’ place in the eastern Cape”.

A lot of modern museums are faced with the challenge of having to be relevant and sometimes of having to re-think how they do their collecting and how they display and narrate the history or collection. During that phase of reinventing the museum, new exhibitions emerge and their meanings may not always be understood as intended. The ‘FamilieVerhalen’ is a very complex exhibition as it tries to move away from stereotypes about African societies in particular South African societies. Although the exhibition sought to show individuality and experiences of the different generations in the families it fell into past categories of showing cultural differences amongst South Africans in terms of ethnicity which is what the Lwandle Museum had made its number one priority not to do, it did not want to be just another cultural museum showing Xhosa culture.

The Tropenmuseum faced a major challenge as a museum which in the past, was a collector and exhibitor of ethnic groups in Africa, which now had to deal with the new government in place which was anti-apartheid, the museum had to restructure itself and rethink its collection.

\textsuperscript{131}L, Witz, ‘Museums, Histories and Dilemmas of Change in Post –Apartheid South Africa’, pp03
\textsuperscript{132}L, Witz, ‘Museums, Histories and Dilemmas of Change in Post –Apartheid South Africa’, pp03
leading to some of it being disposed because they did not fit into the new narrative that it wanted to share or present\textsuperscript{133}. The decision to have the *Family Stories* exhibition was to insert the museum into this changing world that was no longer about racial classifications and ethnic groups but rather about understanding the differences and celebrating them. The museum wanted to reach out to a wider and new audience and so doing they produced the *Family Stories*\textsuperscript{134}.

Tropenmuseum wanted to reclaim itself as a museum of national identity rather than a ‘window of the South’ showcasing the ‘other’\textsuperscript{135}. The first thing on this new agenda was the creation of a multicultural Dutch society\textsuperscript{136}. The *Family Stories* exhibition was intended to be more about memory and experiences and what people choose to remember in this new South Africa, but it ended up contradicting itself because the exhibition was ‘presented as South Africa representing itself to audiences in the Netherlands’\textsuperscript{137} which to me sounds similar to the term that the museum was trying to run away from; being a ‘window of the South’.

In following the concept of the exhibition as South Africa presenting itself, the exhibition was made to seem like a South African view and production of what family is, this suggests that the Netherlands wanted South Africans to be seen as the dominant authority in the making of the exhibition. South Africans who were included in the exhibition concept and design only dealt with some parts of the exhibition the major decisions, especially curatorial decisions were made in the Netherlands\textsuperscript{138}. And at the end of the day it went down to what would sell most in the tourist market which led to some aspects of the exhibition left/ to be kept as attractive and appealing to the European eye, as the largest visitors to the museum, as possible. Even in the proposal made by Faber the exhibition was meant to be something that

the Dutch audience would find interesting\textsuperscript{139}, which sounded more like something you would find on the discovery channel where you will be entertained by new discoveries.

The exhibition sought to tell individual stories rather than stories of cultural groups, but in the selection of families for the exhibition they did just that. They wanted families that were unique, that did not fall into the ethnic stereotypes\textsuperscript{140} but according to the list that was made indicating which families the curator was interested in, that is where you start to see that ethnicity was indeed crucial in the selection process\textsuperscript{141}. The exhibition also had an element of culture injected into it by the display of bead work from the Galada family, which was selected as part of collaboration between the Tropenmuseum and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, the typical township house with tin structure is also displayed. The story of the Galada’s was a rural cultural expression\textsuperscript{142} accompanied by artefact, this was the exhibition to see and of which the Dutch and European audience had much interest in.

The planning phase of the exhibition had the right idea in mind, but the museum struggled to portray South African stories without ethnicity because of the history of the museum and the interest in their target market. Their audiences were interested in individual stories but wanted to see ethnic groups and how people live which is more of what most museum are about today. The exhibition failed in creating understanding between cultures it seems as if it promoted and fed to the ideas that a Dutch community in Netherlands had about South Africa and South African families.

The Lwandle museum has been involved in a number of collaborations with different communities in an attempt to build its audience. The museum has worked with the nearby schools; Khanyolwethu High School, Simanyene High and Rusthof High school in Ambassador school programmes of which I became a part of in 2007. The programmes were mainly education programmes aimed at young people and educating them about the museum, Lwandle, Oral history and photography. The museum together with the District Six museum ran this programme until the end of 2008 with ambassadors from Lwandle and Cape Town via the District Six museum.


Through the designing of new exhibitions like *ImbaliZekhaya/ Stories of Home* in 2005, identifying women ambassadors, being involved in sport and cultural activities and the design and fashion show of the *Lwandle Designers* Exhibition in 2009 the museum was now building its community it even took part in discussions over housing with the then ward councillor Xolani Sotashe\(^{143}\). The Lwandle museum became more than just a museum or a memorial for the migrant labour system it also became an advocate for housing and pressing issues that were facing the residents of Lwandle, the museum saw itself as part of the community sharing the problems of the community and using its professionals and intellect capacity to try and mediate those issues. The notice on hostel 33 during the opening of the museum in 2000 and the issue raised about housing needs in Lwandle saw the museum as a housing mediator speaking to local authorities and housing contractors to try and secure alternative housing for the residents of hostel 33. In 2006 the museum together with local authorities managed to finalise alternative housing for the residents of hostel 33.

In the exhibition entitled *‘Dreaming of a beautiful Lwandle’* the museum tries to bring a more victorious side of Lwandle and the issue of housing and how an area set aside as accommodation for male migrant workers now has its own museum signalling how the museum has been integral in the process of constituting a public citizenry in Lwandle\(^{144}\). Lwandle was now becoming more of a home than just the original intended dormitory area; this is evident in the responses that people gave when interviewed for the *Stories of Home* exhibition.

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\(^{143}\) L, Witz, ‘Museums, Histories and Dilemmas of Change in Post –Apartheid South Africa’, pp03

\(^{144}\) L, Witz, ‘Museums, Histories and Dilemmas of Change in Post –Apartheid South Africa’, pp03
The exhibition looks at the meaning of home. Migrant workers were interviewed and asked to give their reasons of which place is home to them; back in the Eastern Cape or in Lwandle. The responses vary as people give their detailed explanations. Women are included in this exhibition although women did not live in the hostels their husbands and family did, women would work as domestic workers living in the backroom of their employers.

One of the interviewees, Mrs Christine Makhabane who is originally from Ngqamakhwe, states that Ngqamakhwe is her home; she was born there, her ancestors are buried there and that is where she would also like to be buried. She also gives another reason connected to land and space; back in the Eastern Cape the family has enough land for their cattle to graze and for them to build more family housing, in Lwandle all they had was just ‘A Bed called Home’ as Mamphele Ramphele put it. While others like Siboniwe Tyeku showed a more positive look at Lwandle. She talks about how when she first came to Lwandle they struggled to get into the hostels as women were not allowed; they had to sneak in and out. Together with other women they fought for Lwandle to be the community that it is today. She adds that if you look at the beauty of nature surrounding Lwandle; the mountains, the ocean the
forestry, it is more than enough reason for her to call Lwandle home and this is where she would like to be buried.

The issue of burial comes up in a lot of interviews that are done at the Lwandle Museum with residents. They [residents] seem like their way of laying claim to the land of Lwandle is the have their bodies forever buried in the soils of Lwandle, so as to put their final or permanent mark of ownership of the land which in the past was denied to them.

CHAPTER THREE

This chapter focuses at the moments of the emergence of new forms of housing with the RDP programme and the developers that come into the sense. At this stage Lwandle seems to get a sense of who is rich and who is poor, which is different from when it was still a labour compound.

In the post-apartheid Lwandle the difference in economic levels is visible. This chapter explores and documents the different homes in Lwandle, stories that have not been told at the museum and how people tend to see Lwandle as more ‘homely’ than it used to be. The chapter focuses on the making of community space and the making of home. Oral stories are used to see how people describe their community in relation to the narrative, stories and exhibitions of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. Funny enough the latest map at the museum is 2004 (figure 6), ten years has gone by since the museum documented the rapid development of Lwandle. I sought to think about particularly these changes over the last ten years.
The hostels-to-home project which started in 1997 in Lwandle was aimed at building family units/ home. It identified people that were in need of housing. The project started by breaking down the hostels to make them larger to accommodate families, solar system was installed, showers were installed and flushing toilets were installed, before then the residents were using the bucket system for their ablution. This project was completed in Lwandle in 2003; three years after the museum had opened.

The hostel-to-home project changed the way Lwandle looked, the newly built hostels with solar systems mounted on the roofs became the new sign of Lwandle and it received much publicity from sustainable energy in low-cost housing projects (Ward, 2002: 54) books. A lot of new change that was brought by the project was the development of a library for the area, an arts and craft centre, taxi rank and clinic. The Lwandle museum was never part of the project of turning Lwandle into this new ‘community’, probably because there were more pressing issues in peoples’ minds than a museum.
The limited understanding of heritage and heritage institutions I believe is what led the not so good reaction of the residents of Lwandle when and how the museum was introduced to them. McGregor and Schumaker (2006) show the different challenges that heritage practitioners and museums go through to try and preserve heritage but also remain relevant to their audiences or publics. They look at the challenges of dealing with communities and their understanding of museums and heritage management but also the challenge of having to try and please your ‘market’ if I may call it, especially the international market for new museums better known as community museum who do not receive a lot of funding from government.

These museums in this category end up sourcing foreign funds that comes with terms and conditions that sometimes differ from the vision that the museum set out for itself. McGregor and Schumaker talk about ways in which African countries try to ‘‘satisfy tourist desires for specific visual experiences of nature’’145. This means that new experiences are created for tourist that would ensure entertainment hence most museum and tourist destinations have groups ready to perform for tourists what they call cultural dances, this is also the reason for the introduction of storytellers in most museums in Africa to give the tourist the “first -hand experience” and for them to interact with the locals.

At the Lwandle Museum story telling is used differently; the identified story tellers (Mr Molo and Ms Nomilile) both have different experiences of Lwandle and how they came to stay in Lwandle. Mr Molo a long resident of Lwandle, he came in the Western Cape when he was sixteen years old to work on a wine farm in Paarl, he later abandoned that and came to stay in Lwandle hostels. While at the hostels he worked at a restaurant, a hotel and the later a petrol garage station until he retired in 2004. This is the story he tells visitors to his house, he also adds the living conditions of the hostels and how they would sometimes ask the younger men in the hostel to be the one to deal with buying groceries and cooking for the rest of the much older men.

Ms Nomilile’s story is quite different and one that raised a lot of questions from the chairman of the Board of Trustee of the museum, Prof Leslie Witz. Witz is known as the biggest critique of township tours and what they have to offer. Over the years that he has been at the Lwandle museum he has tried to make the experience a more educational and historical narrative than just a walk through the township. Ms Nomilile is known for her sheeben of

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Umqombothi in Lwandle, she is one of the first ladies to start this business. Nomilile was put on the museum township walk by the former curator Bongani Mgijima during the initial stages of the establishment of the museum. At the time the concept worked as it attracted more visitors, mostly tourists, to the museum. As time went on it did not make sense for a museum led by intellectuals who critique the township tours to have Nomilile as a destination as people only went to her house to sip the beer and get the ‘authentic African experience’.

The walk in Lwandle was presented as an opportunity to ‘learn more about the migrant labour system (1958-1994)’ (Lwandle Museum, 2000). But this legacy of repression under apartheid was placed within an internationalised tourist representation of traditional Africa as a place of ethnic rhythms, tastes, and crafts. As with other township tours in Cape Town, the tavern and the craft shop and the crèche became key destinations on the walk. The sheeben became fully incorporated into the tour and was supported by the museum as a story teller. Only recently has this been taken off the tour route but tourists and tour guides from companies are insisting upon the visit.

The development of the hostels in Lwandle and the introduction of free government housing provided the residents with an opportunity to have separate private space that they could call a home. The residents of Lwandle showed the need for housing at a very early age of informal development of the area when they built shacks at Umgababa, after Umgababa came Umgababa A and Umgababa B which today is known as the Greenfields.

Formal houses were built from the first formal child of Lwandle, Nomzamo, which came to exist after people had moved from the hostels to occupy land near the N2 which belonged to the Waterkloof wine estate during the late 1980s. They were removed from that land and placed at Nomzamo some residents moved to Mfuleni near Khayelitsha.

These developments not only made it possible for families to have private space but it also allowed people like Ms Makhabane to start businesses as housing contractors. When she first came in Lwandle she was staying at the back room of her employer. When the opportunity came for her to have a house in Lwandle, she grabbed it. When interviewed about some of the issues of housing in Lwandle she replied; “for ten years I have lived on the informal settlements, I then decide to take a tour and visit other townships to try and find a solution on how we could get houses in Lwandle. I attended workshops with a guy called Deck, when I passed them I then called the residents of Lwandle to tell them this news and I invited them to
bring their names to the new community hall so that I can forward those names to the provincial housing board who took time to approve my project” (interview done by Vumile Nkalitshana, researcher at LMLM, June 2014).

Residents of Lwandle received RDP housing in the late 1990s in an area called the Dessert by residents. But while all other hostel residents had been allocated upgraded family-type housing, there were still people who were left without family housing who then had to move to informal settlements known as Pholile (a place of quietness/relaxation). It is interesting how Lwandle residents name places where they live, it’s as if the names have significance to the way they were being treated by government whom they felt was not providing for them. After the development of Pholile came Silahlwe (translated to we have been abandoned) and more recently Siyanyanzela (translated to we are doing it by force).

Siyanyanzela, adjacent to Lwandle in the settlement of Nomzamo, where people lived on a land that belongs to the National Road Agency, homes were built in a land that seemed available and free to residents. It was these homes that were destroyed on the 2nd and 3rd of June 2014 when it was said that the occupants of the land were there illegally. The 986 residents who were removed from this land took refuge at the Nomzamo Community Hall, accusations followed as to who was responsible for this mass eviction even questions on who authorised that people can stay on the SANRAL owned land. The eviction of residents of Siyanyela became more like history being repeated as letters were published that gave insight to some of the reasons why the residents were evicted. The petition of 1986 had now turned into letter from the Strand residents once again as shown below. Strand rate payers were angry at the rapid growth of Lwandle and how “unsanitary”, “loud” and “ignorant” the people of Siyanyanzela were.
38 Strand Ridge  
Vredenhof Street  
STRAND  
7140  

23/01/2014

Mr Patrick Koen  
Chairman  
Strand Ridge Homeowners’ Association  
37 Strand Ridge  
Vredenhof Road  
STRAND  
7140

Dear Patrick

RE: Security

It is with great anxiety that I write this letter. I am lead to understand that the squatters are building shacks on the SANRAL property that borders on our complex. As there have already been a number of robberies in the area, and even a few in our complex in the recent times, I fear what will happen next.

I know that economic times are bad for everyone, but why should we have to pay increased levies in order to upgrade our security, which the criminals breach anyway. As an older person living in the complex, I am extremely scared, at night in particular, as I have already on two occasions had people running over the roof tops in order to reach the squatter camp quickly. What do we have to do to live peacefully? Do we have to wait until the children are raped and the older people are murdered before something gets done about this? SANRAL must come to the party and help us protect innocent taxpayers who live in the vicinity.

I look forward to hearing a positive outcome from your dealings with SANRAL.

Your sincerely,

Joan Hannah (Miss)
ek het so vinnig getlik dat ek nou curs al die foute sien. Sien aangeheg die korrek brief.

Groete en baie dankie.
Mari

---------- Forwarded message ----------
From: Mari Eastin <marienslin@gmail.com>
Date: Thu, Jan 23, 2014 at 10:43 AM
Subject: Strand Ridge 18 - Complaint
To: willielom@talkomsa.net
Cc: SP du Toit <sp@duoltouche.co.za>

Good day,

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

We are the tenants of Strand Ridge 18, Vredenhof Street, Strand.

Since Saturday, 4 January 2014, the inhabitants of Lwandle started marking plots on Sanral’s grounds, right behind our complex. The Sanral grounds that are meant for the NZ.

We immediately phoned the police and they came and removed the markers and dismantled the people. What amazed me is that there was huge machinery - that I know the inhabitants of Lwandle could never afford. The plots was done professionally. Leads to ask - who is behind this movement?

There was a bit of retaliations and stones where threwed at our houses. At that stage I was sleeping in my room when a huge stone broke our bedroom window. The stone throwing went on for about an hour. Since then, stones are regularly thrown at us. Creating unsafe feelings and Property Damages.

On Saturday the 18th - every started again - with a difference. This time we phoned the police who came out. They were there for about 30 minutes and then left. The people just continued building with tremendous speed. By Saturday night - 10 houses was standing, 6 with roofs and 2 with occupants already,

I believe that all are equal and that every person has a right to a decent dwelling. I understand that promises was made but not kept and therefor understand the frustration BUT.....

Since they started with the plots they have broken into 2 houses and stole 2 bicycles from 2 other houses - one from the enclosed back yard. There is no respect for other people, their property or their well being.

I have lived in this complex since it was build - we NEVER had any incidents, brake-ins or anything accordingly.

For the first time we feel very unsafe in our OWN HOMES!!!
After the eviction of Siyanyanzela residents, Lwandle; a place that people knew very little of, started receiving some media attention both locally and nationally. Although it was breaking news it still remained dislocated and invisible - it was just another informal settlement that could be anywhere in the country. It was in De Certeau's terms situated in the ‘nowhere’. Photographs in national media had a picture of an informal settlement in Khayelitsha. Siyanyanzela was not named in media it was known as just an informal settlement in Lwandle.

During the presentation of a paper at the Lwandle Commission of Enquiry presented by myself and Prof Noëleen Murray; Murray drew upon a history of Lwandle she and Witz have written about to think about a series of themes that have emerged around the making of cultural capital, urban metabolism and political contestation in the unlikely site of the first township museum in the Western Cape. Their major focus was to look at the making of a museum in Lwandle in order to suggest that political struggles are firstly around the very idea of cultural capital, but also around its meanings and appropriations. It is both about whether there should be museum in Lwandle, and about its meanings.

The notion of home in Lwandle and for the residents has remained a complex one as residents are faced with the dilemma of having to fight for a place to stay, a place that they can call home. A lot of residents that were interviewed during the initial stages of this paper showed that they lacked a sense of belonging in Lwandle as they would sometimes be harassed by authorities because of homes built on private owned land. The scheme of homes in Lwandle is the renting of property that has been built in an area called Zola/ Asanda Village in Lwandle near the railway lines. Ironically the issue of safety is not an issue here like it was in Siyanyanzela yet people living are near the informal settlements of Nomzamo and Asanda village.

Home is defined as a private space that the family utilises throughout the day; it is not defined by the size of the structure that it is made of. People would do alterations in the hostels in order to create that feeling of home, they would put photographs of their loved ones to remind them of how and what a home should feel like. People to date are still struggling to find place in Lwandle which they can refer to as home, there are still victims of the eviction who are currently being housed at the Nomzamo community hall. Most of the evictees have not benefited from the temporary housing provided by the City as there has been issues of
‘corruption’ from residents from other informal settlements who were not residents of Siyanyanzela.

As Lwandle develops today you find that the inequality in terms of wages and status is clearly visible with some residents judged by where they live. Those in informal settlements are generally preserved as poor while those in RDP and Bond housing are viewed as the more successful out of the bunch. More young people are now moving out of Lwandle as soon as they receive better jobs, they move out to the more suburb areas of Cape Town and to run away from the stereotype that people from the townships are poor and uneducated.
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Oral history: A Methodology of Historical Inquiry and its Critique

Oral history as a method of historical inquiry and as the product of that process constitutes the core of my research methodology in my thesis entitled ‘The Stone Wall Heritage Project at Robben Island: Complexities, Challenges and Politics’ in which the memories, experiences and voices of the ex-political prisoners are used to influence and shape the restoration project of the washed away Stone wall on the site as part of conservation on a world heritage site. This wall to the ex-political prisoners symbolises a ‘memorial monument’ for their suffering and torture on the site. It is therefore against this background that this essay takes to task the method of oral history by looking at its history, conceptual framework, how it has been engaged in other social or historical projects and finally demonstrate how relevant it is in my Masters research thesis.

There are varied definitions of what oral history is by different scholars. Lynn Abrams (2010) defines it as “the process of conducting and recording interviews with people in order to elicit information from them about the past. But an oral history is also the product of that interview, the narrative account of past events.”[146] It is also defined and understood as “‘recovery history’; the practice of interviewing people to provide evidence about the past events which could not be retrieved from conventional historical sources, usually written ones or to uncover the hidden histories of individuals or groups which had gone unremarked in mainstream accounts.”[147]

The genesis of contemporary oral history was the post- World War II renaissance in the use of memory as source for historical research. Paul Thompson among others charts the prehistory of the modern oral history movement, explaining that historians from the ancient times relied upon eyewitness accounts of significant events, until the nineteenth century.

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development of an academic history discipline led to the primacy of archival research and documentary sources, and the marginalization of the oral evidence.\textsuperscript{148}

Gradual acceptance of the usefulness and validity of oral evidence, and the increasing availability of portable tape recorders, underpinned the development of oral history after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{149} The timing and pattern of this emergence differed markedly around the world. For example the first organised oral history project was initiated by Allan Nevins at Columbia University in New York in 1948, and his interest in archival recordings with white male elites was representative of early oral history activity in the United States.\textsuperscript{150}

In Britain and the Nordic countries its emergence can be traced as far back as 1950s and 1960s. This was after long period in which the Oral source was being disregarded in favour of the written records. Its emergence was due to the growing need to collect folklore tradition and also the rise of social history and historical sociology which depended on Oral history as a tool for collecting the voices of the peasants.\textsuperscript{151}

In Africa its emergence and growing popularity is directly linked to the notions of colonization and decolonization of the continent. Thus immediately after attaining their hard won independence the newly freed countries sought to redefine and reconstruct their identity and history. It was clearly problematic that they could seek and identify themselves through the use of mediated colonial history which had for long periods regarded Africans as primitive, uncivilized and people with no history. The history of Africa was awash with colonial misinterpretation. Worse still the colonialists regarded African histories as “fragile, critical problematic source of the past of the continent.”\textsuperscript{152}

It was against this backdrop that African history and historiography emerged into prominence and value. The historians of Africa recognized the possibility of giving the continent the past and at the same time valorizing Africa and its culture before a world audience by

constructing, unveiling the record of the past. However in order to achieve in writing the new history of Africa from an African perspective there was need for a methodology that would fully involve the ordinary Africans in ‘writing’ their neglected narratives. Oral history and Oral traditions were the only way to realize this.

So, as a result scholar like Hampade Ba were strong advocates of this notion that the only way of understanding Africa’s past and history is through oral tradition and the living heritage. Thus in less than five decades the field of African history had emerged from a relatively obscure and marginal position among the varieties of scholarship in and on Africa. The interest in African history had grown at a faster rate than any other field in the discipline of history. It was a common belief that voices and words from the Africans themselves were a means of authenticating and giving authority and truth to the African narrative. All this effort to recover the African past was possible through the works of Oral history as a methodology.

Such has been the emergence and role of oral history in recovering the history of Africa by historians who engaged in African historiography during the early years of independence in Africa.

Oral history as a method of historical inquiry involves the human subjects. These are the interviewees or informants whom the historian asks questions to trigger their memories and experience as sources on which to reconstruct history. Memory and experience therefore constitute critical conceptual frameworks when dealing with oral history. What is memory? And what is experience? Are memory and history the same? What are the dynamics of remembering in reconstructing history? It’s important to answer these questions because they help in informing the oral historian what actually happens during the oral history interview.

Scholars like Pierre Nora, Alessandro Portelli and Lyn Abrahams have argued that rather than occurring naturally, memory is socially constructed both at the individual level and at societal level. At the level of the individual or self, the construction of memory is influenced by socialisation and one’s understanding of and relations to the social-economic and ideological forces in the society. Collective memory is also influenced by ideology and by political

forces that attempt to influence deliberately the way a society views itself by privileging specific traces of its history over others.

Many people, especially in everyday life conceptualise memory as something that exist in someone’s mind or subconscious about past events. For many, memory is a real psychological entity, piled with someone’s past experiences that can be tapped into for explanations, remembrances, reflections and narratives of the past.

However, according to Pierre Nora, as opposed to popular belief, memory is not real. It is nothing more than *invented* traces of history.\(^{154}\) Despite taking its traces from history, memory is not located in the past but gives a *sense* of history in the presence.\(^{155}\) It is alive because it is not static and is constantly evolving and adapting to the changing realities of the society or individuals in which it is held.\(^{156}\) These extremely complex characteristic of memory is what makes memory not to be static but it can change over time and the same event can hold different memories for different groups of people. Hence memories change over time and space although this change may not be perceptible.

Unlike history, memory is not fixed. It is fluid. Instead of living in the past as perceived by many people, memory is a constantly contemporary phenomenal lived everyday through aspects of daily life moulded by our past and constantly accommodated within present day realities.\(^{157}\) Nora further claims that despite the general understanding that history and memory are similar, they are actually totally opposite of each other.\(^{158}\) So opposite is history to memory that history’s ultimate goal is the destruction of memory.\(^{159}\) What this means I believe is that once people’s memories are made into history through writing, then this history ultimately destroys the very aspects of these events that made them memory, such as the ability to adapt and change. History makes the memory static because it freezes or fixes the memory in time and thus kills it and replaces it with the literary. With the written history, there is no need for the self-reflectiveness that memory has because its interpretation is made inert by being recorded as history.

Furthermore, Portelli seems to suggest that the act of transcribing ‘memory’ from an oral interview is also symbolic of killing the memory in several ways. When the interview is transcribed, the transition from the oral to the literal changes the memory completely.\textsuperscript{160} Language with its rules of grammar changes the meaning of the interviewee.\textsuperscript{161} Again, the written transcribed document is too inadequate to capture the meanings of gestures such as tone of voice, silences or poses of the speech, body language of the interviewee, etc.\textsuperscript{162} All these which are an inherent part of the memory are killed in the transcription and their meanings and symbolism completely lost. The destruction of the original oral interviews or the relegation to places of less importance than the written document symbolises the death of the memory of the source.\textsuperscript{163}

It is because of the danger that history constantly poses to the survival of memory that people need sites of memory in order to hold on to some semblance of memory, to pay homage to memory. Sites of memory take the form of memorials, commemorations, archives, museums, etc. Sites of memory are then a reaction against the annihilation of memory posed by appropriation, manipulation and above all history. The fact that society needs to actively and deliberately protect memory by the sites of memory is further indication that memory does not occur naturally.\textsuperscript{164}

If memory is about what society privileges to be remembered then it is as much about what is chosen to be forgotten.\textsuperscript{165} It is undeniable that in society certain events are more ‘remembered’ than others, or the memory of certain people is highlighted over the memory of other people of equal or more importance. In many post-independence African nations, certain liberation heroes such as Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Kamuzu Banda of Malawi and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana are overemphasised over others who did far more than these celebrated characters. On an individual level, Portelli notes that, during interviews about people’s life stories, certain aspects of their life are glossed over, while aspects equal or even

less importance are highlighted. On this I find Portelli to be in resonance with Paul Thomson in his book *The Voice of the Past*. Thomson notes that during the interview “the willingness to remember is also essential: a feature of memory which is essential to interviewing. Conversely recall can be prevented by unwillingness: either a conscious avoidance of distasteful facts or the unconscious repression.”

The act of choosing what is forgotten or what is left out in a nation is an important process by which an individual constructs an identity from memory. Similarly, the use of ‘forgetting’ certain aspects of history is an important tool in identity politics and state building in societies. According to the agenda of the individual or groups of individuals, memory can be constructed through forgetting certain aspects of events.

This aspect of memory and remembering especially at collective level for example as a nation brings the whole notion of contested memory and contested pasts as has been argued by Katherine Hodgine and Susannah Radstone. In their work they argue that “to contest the past is of course, to pose questions about the present and what the past means in the present.”

Often in such situations there are different and conflicting memories of how the past should be remembered in the present.

A case in point can be that of the massacre in Matebeleland soon after independence in Zimbabwe. This was during the civil war between the ZANU forces of Robert Mugabe and ZAPU forces of Joshua Nkomo. The forces of Mugabe massacred the people of Matebeleland as a retribution for their support of ZAPU in what is known today as the Matebele massacre. After the war the two warring parties re-united to form what is called ZANU-PF. However, today any attempts to remember the events of this troubled period are continuously suppressed by the current Zimbabwe government. Accessibility to archives which are institutions of memory concerning the facts about the massacre are restrictive. The government even denies and disputes that it was not a massacre and challenges the presence of any mass graves. This is contested memory of Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle.

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Another important aspect in the discourse of Oral history is that of experience and how it is used in reconstructing history especially that from below. Historians and other scholars of human sciences such as anthropologist produce knowledge of the past using the evidence of experience from subjects. Many people understand experience as the acquisition of knowledge through directly participating in events or processes. This definition of experience conceptualises experience as being linear, autonomous and incontestable. And yet scholars of oral history have refuted these general assumptions of experience and in doing so have critiqued its application in oral history. Scholars like Joan Scott, Belinda Bozzoli, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rasool are among those who have questioned the role of experience in oral history.

While it is difficult to give a precise definition of what experience is, it is safe to state that experience is the first hand participation in an event, events or process. Commenting on Samuel Delany’s gay bathhouse experience, Scott observes that ‘Seeing enables him to comprehend the relationship between his personal activities and politics.’\(^{170}\) By seeing visually what is happening people gain knowledge that is unmediated, the ‘experience’ helps the individual to formulate an understanding without undue influences. Therefore ‘experience’ is seen as a privileged, first hand, unadulterated knowledge.

While acknowledging that experience has been an important tool in writing oppositional narratives and different histories from those that had previously ignored sections of society, Scott expresses discomfort with seeing experience as a foundational basis of knowledge.\(^{171}\) Scott argues that experience should not be viewed as ‘… incontestable evidence and as an originally point of explanation…’\(^{172}\) Firstly by taking the identity of those whose experience is been recorded at face value and as incontestable, historians of difference fall into the same pitfalls as the other orthodox historians. They recreate the same categories such as identity and class that orthodox historians did. Here, for example, by trying to write the oral history of blacks or women from their experiences, the identity and differentiation of blackness or gender is further elaborated cementing these categories further more.

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Secondly when experience is taken as the foundation of knowledge, it is assumed that the experience should be taken as totally true and that there is no justification needed for the details held in the experience. Furthermore, when experience is viewed as a foundation for knowledge, issues key to the issues that relate to the experience are ignored. These include among others, the fact that experience itself is constructed as opposed to real.\textsuperscript{173} What this means is that each person constructs experience according to their own interpretation of the events that made up the experience. This interpretation is guided by the social factors and the kind of socialisation that the person had which in turn guides values. This is because individuals attach different meanings and interpretations to their experience that is influenced by their particular circumstances, background and so many other factors. This is why the same event can be told differently by people who experienced it in the exact same circumstances.

In this case the ‘experience’ from the exact same event at the exact same time will be different by people from two different culture or even from the same culture but in which the characteristic of the individuals e.g. gender has socialised them into holding different values. Therefore, each person constructs experience according to their own understanding and relation to the society. If experience was real, then each person would have the same ‘experience’ of events or processes. For example, in the account of the death of Luigi Trastulli Alessandro Portelli shows us how the same event is told differently by the police, by the streetwalkers and by the factory workers. Even though these claim to have participated in the same event they had their different experience of that event.\textsuperscript{174}

Additionally, Scott demonstrates how experience can be internal, when experience is viewed as the core of someone’s existence or external when experiences are the factors that direct a person’s acts.\textsuperscript{175} When experience is viewed in this way, people focus more on the lives of people instead of focusing on deeper issues like how identities are produced and the various processes in these lives. Hence certain state of being like been identified as a black or a maid or any such identities are taken for granted and taken as normal instead of focusing on deeper


\textsuperscript{174}Alessandro Portelli, The Death of Luigi Trastuli and Other Essays (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991)

issues of how such identities come to be and the ideological situations in which these identities mushroom.\textsuperscript{176} Elaborating this point, Bozzoli notes that, ‘People’s history…is shaped in the crucible of politics and penetrated by the influence of ideology on all sides.’\textsuperscript{177} While people’s memories are important sources of information for writing history, the historical forces, socio-political environment such as class system cannot be divorced from the analysis of the experience. This is because a person’s experience and interpretation of an event is heavily influenced by how they situate themselves in the wider socio-political arena.

It is for this reason that Bozzoli insists that that people’s experiences should be understood within the wider framework of their political economy and ideological philosophies in which they live.\textsuperscript{178}

Furthermore, when writing history from the subject’s experience, researchers always assume that they are objective and are autonomous and yet this is not the case. In the eye of the researcher, his perceived autonomy and objectivity is used to justify that he is writing a true unbiased history. Scott argues that this is questionable. Firstly, the researcher’s own identity and how he relates with others and his subjects all make him subjective and not objective.

Commenting on Charles Van Onslen’s experience when collecting oral testimonies of Kas Maine, Minkley and Rassool elaborate on how the researchers own identity and his interaction with the subject whose experience he is recording can be problematic.\textsuperscript{179} Hence the process of collecting the oral history from someone with ‘experience’ in that subject is itself an experience that impacts on what is finally produced i.e. the written document. The way that the historian will interpret the experiences of his subject is affected not only by his identity which also shape his experiences but also the many socio-political influences surrounding him. Because of these influences the researcher’s claim to autonomy and objectivity should be questioned and consequently the history he writes. This is why social


\textsuperscript{177}Bozzoli Belinda, Town and Countryside (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), p 6.


history is problematic. This is because social history mostly used the experience of the lower class to write histories of difference.

In addition, for Belinda Bozzoli, the use of evidence of experience raises a number of problems. Firstly the scholars or researchers’ own conceptualisations of his intellectual superiority compared to the informers may lead him to be suspicious and give less value to the oral testimonies. Secondly in many cases, there has been a tendency on the part of the researchers to romanticise or idealise what is presented as factual and therefore attach more significance to the evidence of the experience than is necessary.

The researcher should use data qualitatively, from the oral testimonies on people’s experiences; the researcher should be able to understand the quality of the life of the informer. In many cases the researcher would not have lived in that circumstance hence it is important for to be empathetic and pick up salient aspects of the subjects life from the information given.

Additionally, the researcher using experience as historical evidence should take on acritical, analytical and interpretive stance to his subjects’ experiences. This is because the experience of an individual may point to something that is far different than what is presented or apparent in the narrative. Hence the meanings in experiences should not be taken at face value.

Discussing the use of experience in writing social history, Minkley and Rassool elaborate on how individual memory is affected by societal memory. While individual memory is indisputably an important resource for information, it can sometimes be heavily influenced by societal memory. When this happens, the individual’s remembrance of his experience is laden with a grander, communal and non-individualistic remembrance of the events. This

180 Bozzoli Belinda, Town and Countryside (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983).
is a weakness with experience as a source of historical information. This is because societal memory is usually more constructed than individual memory and therefore more prone to exaggeration and manipulation.  

The methodology of oral history has been subjected to a number of criticisms. Some have questioned its subjectivity and unreliability as it relies much on human subjects whose memories are liable to forgetting and manipulation. Others still question the logic of regarding one person’s experience or life story as being the whole representative and reflection of the entire community. Thus at the core of criticism of Oral history in the early 1970s was the assertion that memory was distorted by physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age, by the personal bias of both interviewer and interviewee, and by the influence of collective and retrospective versions of the past. For example, the Australian historian Patrick O’Farrel wrote in 1979 that Oral history was moving into “the world of image, selective memory, later overlays and utter subjectivity ...And where will it lead us? Not into history, but into myth.”

Challenged with these critics, early Oral historians developed their own handbook guidelines to assess the reliability of oral memory while shrewdly reminding the traditionalist that documentary source many of which were created as records of spoken events were no less selective and biased. From social psychology and anthropology, they showed how to determine the bias and tabulation of memory, the significance of retrospection and the effects of the interviewer upon remembering. From sociology they adopted methods of representative sampling, and from documentary history they brought rules for checking the reliability and internal consistency of their sources. These guidelines provided useful signposts for reading memories and for combining them with other historical sources to find out what happened in the past. 

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Paul Thompson, a social historian at the University of Essex, played a leading role in the creation of the British Oral History Society in the early 1970s and the subsequent development of an international oral history movement from the end of that decade. His pioneering book, *The Voice of the Past: Oral history* became the standard textbook and a standard bearer for oral historians around the world.

In his work Thompson sought to defend oral history against critics who claimed that memory was unreliable historical source, and determined to prove the legitimacy and value of the approach. As a socialist, he was committed to a history which drew upon the words and experiences of working class people, and argued that oral history was transforming both the content of history—"by shifting the focus and opening new areas of inquiry, by challenging some of the assumptions and accepted judgments of historians, by bringing recognition to substantial groups of people who had been ignored"—and the processes of writing history, breaking "through the boundaries between the professional and the ordinary public."\(^{189}\)

Other imaginative oral historians turned these criticisms on their head and argued that the so-called unreliability of memory was also its strength, and that subjectivity of memory provided clues not only about the meanings of historical experience, but also about the relationships between past and the present, between memory and personal identity, and between individual and collective memory. For example, Luisa Passerini’s study of Italian memories of interwar fascism highlighted the role of subjectivity in history, the conscious and unconscious meanings of experience as lived and remembered and showed how the influences of public culture and ideology upon individual memory might be revealed in the silences, discrepancies and idiosyncrasies of personal testimony.\(^ {190}\)

The work of Italian historian Alessandro Portelli provides us also with a strong counter argument against the critics of oral history. In “What Makes Oral History Different”, first published in 1979, Portelli challenged the critics of “unreliable memory” head on by arguing that the peculiarities of oral history which encompass orality, narrative form, subjectivity, the different credibility of memory, and the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee should be considered as strengths rather than as weakness, a resource rather than a

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problem. He further writes that “the first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about events than about their meaning… Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing and what they now think they did…”

Oral history as the historical method of inquiry is the process and also ‘a performance’. Thus Portelli precisely calls the oral interview as a ‘dialogic performance’ in which the historian and the narrator are actively engaged. Both parties have a role to play in this performance. Using his questions, the historian activates the memory of the experiences of the narrator. Thus oral history interviews are constructed, for better for worse, by the active intervention of the historian

As a process Oral history exists in four forms or stages and these are the original oral interview, the recorded version of the interview, the written transcription and the interpretation of the interview. One can also say that the last three are simply the products of the original oral interview.

However, there are some dynamics and complexities that are encountered during transcription and translation of the interviews as noted by Alessandro Portelli. When transferring the information from the original interview which is the performance into text some meanings and expressions that are inherent in performance lose their power and flavour when put into text.

The transcribing of memory from an oral interview therefore is akin to destruction of the memory in a number of ways; Language with its prescriptions of grammar alters the meaning of the respondents; the transcribed document is ineffective to reflect the basic characteristics of orality like the gestures, pitches of the voice, body language and even tonality. In the end what is produced as the final document becomes the product of the interviewer and the interviewee. This is what is called the co-authorship of Oral history product.

Historians and cultural researchers have used oral history as a method to generate information from people by enabling them to talk about their personal lives, share tales and memories of repression and resistance experienced with colonial and post-colonial encounters. Some examples of such projects and studies include those of Laura Longmore’s study of single African women in Johannesburg using testimonies in juvenile courts to read family relations. Her study was deemed as key contribution to Urban Sociology. Robben Island Museum in 2002 devised what was called reference groups in a project in order to get information from the former prisoners, whose stories were not heard and were overshadowed by the huge figure of Nelson Mandela to tell their life and history on the Island during the times when the Island was serving as a notorious maximum prison. The oral history from these ex-prisoners was meant to assist in the interpretation narrative of this site as a place where human spirit triumphed over the forces of injustice and oppression. In fact, Robben Island had adopted and adapted this approach from Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland where many Jews were gassed to death during the holocaust. Surviving Jews were interviewed to narrate their life story as part of the history of this once cruelest place in the world. In the article, my community, my history, my practice’ by Horacio Ramirez oral history as a method was also prominently used in his project on the people of San Salvador.

Like with other projects mentioned, my research work will also largely rely on oral history method. My work converges both the discourses of heritage and history on the site of Blue Stone Quarry into one thesis. It focuses on how the heritage on the site is managed as is manifested in the ongoing project of restoration of the stone wall that was once built through the hard labour of the ex-political prisoners on the site.

Therefore, it is important that I get to research on the history of this site in relation to the wall, the significance of the wall to the prisoners in the past and in the present. Thus what did the wall mean to them in the past and what is the meaning and significance of the wall to them in the present? It will also focus on how the ex-prisoners with regard to this project want the wall to look like based on the significance that they attach to it in the present. Do

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they want it to be changed per the recommendations of the engineers working on the wall? Or should it be maintained as it was in the past since may be this symbolizes a monument to remember their suffering on the site?

For all these aspects to be captured therefore I will rely on the recorded oral history interviews that Robben Island had with the ex-political prisoners who worked on Blue Stone Quarry during that Reference Group Project in 2002. These recorded oral histories will enable me to have a full understanding of the history of the site and the wall itself and what the wall meant to them in the past and what it means today from their memories and experiences.

I will also use oral history to interview those ex-political prisoners who are in the board of the project to represent their fellow ex-political prisoners. These will also provide an insight on how they want the wall to be like during this project and why they want it so. Thus through their memories of the past they will be able to provide what significance the wall mean to them today and how they want this significance not to be compromised by the engineering works.

The other approaches to oral history will be used to interview the various interest groups involved in this project namely the environment department, the heritage department, the tourism department, the administration department and Construction Company on how they are shaping the project especially by identifying the key issues of contestation in the project and how these have been resolved.

In summary this essay has provided the history of oral history and some other important conceptual frame works that underpin this methodology. It has also demonstrated some of the challenges of this approach through the scholarly critics by other historians. Finally, it has also shown how this methodology will be used during my research thereby underscoring its relevance to my thesis.
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RELIGION ON ROBBEN ISLAND: WAYS IN WHICH POLITICAL PRISONERS USED RELIGION TO COPE WITH INCARCERATION

by

PULANE M. MAHULA

INTRODUCTION

The recorded history of Robben Island is one that has a very rich tapestry spanning almost five hundred years. Prior to this time, there is some evidence that the Island’s history goes further\footnote{For example, reference to this was made in Charlene Smith \textit{Robben Island} (Cape Town: Struik Publishers,1997) and Harriet Deacon’s \textit{The Island} (Cape Town: David Phillip Publishing,1996)} although for the purposes of this paper the latter part of the site’s history is going to be concentrated on. The Robben Island Prison has an unfortunate legacy of torture that was also coupled with a struggle by the inmates to get help and support in surviving the barely humane treatment by the warders, through challenging the ‘conditions that made it a hell-hole’ and working to secure inmates’ physical endurance as well as ‘mental endurance’ and ultimately victory over their struggles.\footnote{Fran L. Buntman, \textit{Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 34.}

The period that is of interest for the purposes of producing this paper is the time when the Prison Services Department was administering the Island and it was transformed into a prison which kept violent repeat offenders. This was the status quo when the first political prisoners were brought to the Island to serve out their time. This was during the early 1960’s, less than two decades after the official implementation of the apartheid policy, which was first implemented in 1948, as a policy that was more committed to comprehensive racism. As a policy, apartheid promised a comprehensive segregation of all ethnic groups of South Africa into their own national units.\footnote{Buntman, ‘\textit{Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid}’, 15.} It was a system of rule of the that saw the white minority achieve economic, political and social superiority over the majority black population through a range of laws and official government action.\footnote{Ibid}

Official control by the SA Prisons Services was assumed on the 1\textsuperscript{st} April 1961, although Robben Island became an apartheid political prison in 1962 and the first political prisoners
were mainly PAC supporters.\textsuperscript{199} Before it became a political prison, Robben Island was used to house common-law prisoners. The initial lot of political prisoners on the Island had a hard time although some of the harsh treatment was mitigated by ‘Coloured’ warders. When the Prison Service took over the Island, the warders who had the responsibility of looking after the prisoners were what the apartheid state categorised as ‘white’ and ‘coloured’. However, the ‘coloured’ warders were eventually removed from the Island as it became apparent that the ‘coloured’ warders were empathising with the prisoners through attempting to make the prisoners’ lives more bearable. In the end, by 1963, the ‘coloured’ warders were removed and there remained only the white warders working on Robben Island Prison.\textsuperscript{200}

This was in part because it seemed unlikely that white warders would willingly assist their black charges to make their lives more bearable. This also was a unique situation in that all white warders were responsible for a group of all black prisoners, both common-law and political.\textsuperscript{201}

According to the recollections of numerous ex-political prisoners, the conditions on Robben Island were some of the harshest especially when compared to other prisons in the South Africa. This is not to say other prisons were ideal, but because of the unique character that has been alluded to in the preceding paragraph, the situation on the Island was particularly bad. Apart from the harsh weather conditions that saddle the prison, some of the warders contributed to the extremely harsh experiences which the inmates encountered. Some of the prisoners believed that they were deliberately mistreated by the ‘the vengeful and racist state’.\textsuperscript{202}

This can be exemplified by Neville Alexander’s assertion that the principal policy demarcations were determined by the political authorities even though the political prisoners were already imprisoned and under the responsibility of the Prison Service.\textsuperscript{203} During the time when political prisoners were still housed together with common-law prisoners, violent criminal prisoner gangs were used to deliberately punish the political prisoners. However,

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\textsuperscript{199} Pan Africanist Congress
\textsuperscript{200} Buntman ‘Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid’, 204.
\textsuperscript{201} Eddie Daniels in an interview with Ruendree Govinder on the 27 November 2005
\textsuperscript{202} Buntman, ‘Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid’, 195.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid
\end{flushright}
this type of abuse decreased when political prisoners started voicing their objections to senior departmental staff.204

Aside from the fact that the warders were white, they also arrived at the Island prison with the belief that the prisoners on the Robben Island were terrorists and were put on the Island to remove them from society. The warders were indoctrinated through the indication, albeit unofficially, that it was through their service to the Prison Service that they would be able to ‘put the kaffir in his place’.205 This meant that the warders were indirectly given permission to suppress the actions of the political prisoners and discourage them from continuing to fight for their rights through ‘reducing them to nothing’.206 This was done in a variety of ways that were aimed at dehumanising the political prisoners.

Furthermore, the prisoners on the Island held the belief that warders were only allowed to work on the Island for short time prior to being transferred to other prisons. This was a deliberate policy of the prison officials of curbing the likelihood of the warders having a relationship with their charges and that might have led to them being sympathetic or empathising with them.207 This is just an indication of the prisoners felt their treatment was orchestrated and sustained from the upper echelons of the apartheid state.

On the other hand, the socio-economic background which the majority of the warders came from might have exacerbated the inhumane treatment of the prisoners. The majority of warders came from deprived circumstances such as orphanages and had little education prior to employment by the Prison Service.208 To elaborate on this point, Buntman, in citing some of the ex-political prisoners, contends that in the majority of cases the prison service was staffed by individuals who would otherwise not been ideal employment candidates anywhere else. The assertion was that only the ‘least qualified, virtually unemployable types’ were willing to work for the Prison Service.209 Indres Naidoo, who was at one time imprisoned on Robben Island, also indicates that a large proportion of warders came from deprived circumstances with very little education.

204 Ibid. 197
206 Buntman, ‘Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid’, 196
207 Buntman, Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid, 203.
208 Buntman, Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid, 204
209 Buntman, Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid, 205
Additionally, it may be that the warders felt like they were imprisoned on the Island together with their charges also exacerbated the inhumane treatment of the prisoners. In addition, it is alleged that none of them actively volunteered to be based on the Island as they felt the location was as bad for them as it was for the prisoners and this might have been another contributing factor to the harsh treatment that was meted out to the prisoners.\textsuperscript{210} The warders might have been reacting to the resentment they felt towards the prisoners who were in some warped way responsible for them being on the Island, as they would not need to be there if the prisoners had not ‘broken’ the law. This resentment could have translated into them seeking ways to get even by ill-treating and abusing the prisoners.

On arrival on the Island the prisoners were housed in different sections, there was the general section where the majority of the prisoners were housed. It should be noted that in the general section political prisoners were mixed with common-law inmates. Then there was the isolation cells section which was used to house the perceived leaders of the banned political organisations. Eddie Daniels indicates that on his arrival on the Island, he was allocated a cell in the isolation block, which was also the top security block.\textsuperscript{211} He goes on to indicate that the treatment of the new arrivals to the block could make even the strongest man lose hope, for example an individual could be locked up for up to 3 days without being let out of the cell at all. The sense of isolation was also compounded by the fact that apart from the tiny measurement of the cell, the cells were fitted with two doors, one wooden one and another, standard prison issue iron grille door. For some years total silence had to be observed at all times. There was also segregation in the type of food that prisoners received, ‘Coloureds’ and Indians received bread, tea with sugar and soup while Africans would receive pap tea/coffee with no sugar and mealies and no bread at all.\textsuperscript{212}

The conditions on Robben Island were harsh and characterized by actions such as the ‘carry-ons’, that are described as mass beatings of prisoners by warders where the prisoners were tied and manacled in pairs in the prison courtyard and being beaten by warders as they were ordered to run as fast as possible, inadequate clothing and substandard food that was barely enough. Further harsh treatment of the prison population was exemplified through withdrawal

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid, 203
\textsuperscript{211} Eddie Daniels Interview with Wolfie Kodesh
\textsuperscript{212} Eddie Daniels Interview with Wolfie Kodesh
of study privileges ‘on flimsy excuses’, censoring of letters, which is described as psychological torture by one of the former inmates on the Island.\(^{213}\)

Based on the literature consulted and the interviews conducted,\(^{214}\) it has become apparent that the conditions on Robben Island were very much less than ideal, apart from the fact individuals were sent to prison, to serve out their sentences and being imprisoned is already punishment enough, the accounts that I read seemed to indicate conditions that were unbearably harsh and violent. However, comparing the decades from the early 1960’s to the late 1980’s, the conditions in the prison and the treatment of the prisoners gradually changed and were seen to be more bearable. This does not remove from the unbearable nature of being imprisoned for fighting for enfranchisement.

Looking at factors that come to play on Robben Island, it is my assertion that the prisoners who were brought Robben Island to serve out their sentences were isolated in several different ways, namely, geographically, physically and emotionally. To elaborate on this assertion, it is my belief that the individuals placed on Robben Island through incarceration were being housed at an Island has a long history of banishment\(^{215}\), that was removed from the mainland, as some form of emotional torture. The contention of the prisoners was that they were deliberately removed from broader society as an attempt to isolate them from their loved ones and relatives as another way of attempting to make them emotionally vulnerable.

To further work on the minds of those incarcerated on the Island, the authorities further isolated them through restricting their access to news from outside, by making newspapers and news bulletins unavailable for them. Further the prisoners’ interaction with their relatives and loved ones was restricted through restricting visits to them as well as heavily censoring the limited number of letters that they were allowed to receive annually while in prison.

\(^{213}\) Michael Dingake cited in Fran Buntman’s book ‘Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid, 33; Mmutlanyane S. Mogoba, Faith on Robben Island – Steel, Steel and Sjambok (Johannesburg: Ziningweni Communications 2003), 22.

\(^{214}\) Several biographies and oral history interviews were consulted by the writer in an effort to get an account that that as conclusive as possible, some of those read include those of Indres Naidoo, Stanley Mokgoba, Neville Alexander, Laloo Chiba and Eddie Daniels to mention a few. Apart from this the writer conducted oral history interviews with several ex-political prisoners, namely Thulani Mabaso, Vusumzi Mcongo, Bafo Nguqu, who are currently working at the Robben Island Museum.

\(^{215}\) See Charlene Smith’s Robben Island and Harriet Deacon’s The Island as to the references to these assertions
According to Eddie Daniels one of the ex-political prisoners; the brutality that the prisoners experienced at the hands of the prison warders was only a continuation of carrying out the aims of the government of trying to destroy them, both physically and mentally. Regardless of these efforts they (prison officials and government) failed, because the prisoners survived and their spirits remained high.\textsuperscript{216}

In prison, the prisoners were graded into categories with category A being the most flexible grading that enabled those categorized as such to, for instance, being on Band A meant having more allowances than those graded category D, which was the lowest grading. Smith indicates that category D prisoners, that she referred to as entry level prisoners, were allowed one half hour visit every six months and a 500 word letter bi-annually, progressing to four visits and four letters as the grading improved.\textsuperscript{217}

Throughout the history of Robben Island, the various groups of people who resided there had to have had a way in which they dealt with being cut off from the broader community. Hence they had to create a new community into which they could integrate themselves. To this end, there is evidence that the different churches and religious memorial became intertwined into the fabric of the Island. Currently there is the Church of the Good Shepherd (the only privately owned property on the Island; owned by the Anglican Church), the previously Anglican Garrison Church (one of the oldest buildings on the Island), which is now an inter-denominational place of worship, and the Muslim Kramat.

It is in light of the above mentioned brief introduction that I found it an interesting task to attempt a look at the influences of religion as a way of coping with these difficult conditions on Robben Island. Another thing that made me interested in looking at this angle is because most of the literature consulted concentrated on the role that sports and political discussions had on the morale of the prisoners but not much is written about the role of religion on the Island and how the prisoners might have used and perhaps manipulated religion in making an effort to make the conditions easier to live with. In cases where religion was mentioned in the some of the literature consulted, this was done in passing and required one to be actively on the lookout for it.

It should however be noted that the prisoners were not the only ones who attempted to use religion as a strategy; the apartheid state also used religion to endeavour to explain their

\textsuperscript{217} Smith, \textit{Robben Island}, 98; Naidoo, \textit{Island in Chains}, 55.
discriminatory practices. This is confirmed by Eddie Daniels through his assertion that the apartheid regime attempted to use religion to attempt an explanation as to why whites had jobs that were superior to those of black people; the feeling was that this was a way of indoctrinating blacks to accept their lot in life.\textsuperscript{218}

Despite the suffering that was endured by the inmates at Robben Island, especially those imprisoned for political misdeeds, the more prominent of the prisoners acknowledged the role of interaction with fellow prisoners. There were interactions, conversations and discussions where individual and collective problems were talked about. These dealings resulted in giving those imprisoned a confidence in themselves and also strengthened their spirituality resulting in freedom from preoccupation with the less than ideal conditions at the prison.\textsuperscript{219}

\textsuperscript{218} Eddie Daniels Interview with Wolfie Kodesh.
\textsuperscript{219} Smith, \textit{Robben Island}, 5.
CHAPTER 1

USING RELIGION TO RELIEVE THE PLIGHT OF PRISONERS ON THE ISLAND

The history of banishment on Robben Island is a long one, as it has been indicated in the introductory section of this paper. Religion became a way in which those who worked with the prisoners used to attempt to fulfil their mandate aimed at alleviating the plight of people who had been unfortunate enough to be incarcerated on the Island is a long one. Under the apartheid regime Robben Island became the prison in which the majority of those categorised as Black (which included Africans, people of mixed race who were referred to as ‘Coloureds’ and Indians), who were opposed to this regime and its consolidation of its many repressive laws were incarcerated from 1962 – 1991.\(^\text{220}\)

When compared to other South African prisons, Robben Island had largest concentration of political prisoners over the longest period of time and thus became a symbol which has come to be associated with apartheid’s imprisonment of its political opponents.\(^\text{221}\)

According to some authors\(^\text{222}\), Robben Island became a symbol of the quest for political freedom of people who had to endure inhumane treatment because of the colour of their skins. Hence, after the end of apartheid, it became a sort of place of pilgrimage for those who had fought against the unacceptable treatment of fellow humans, as confirmed by the assertion that ‘…freedom fighters and any exiled South African endeavours to make a pilgrimage to Robben Island to commemorate the lives of those who suffered on Robben Island for the freedom of their country, South Africa.’\(^\text{223}\)

The inmates on the Island became ingenious in making efforts to meet with other prisoners as well as to gather as much information as possible regarding what was happening outside the prison. One such way was through the guaranteed attendance at all church services by all prisoners. Doing this enabled them to meet and exchange notes with those whom they would ordinarily not have been able to meet. Furthermore, they attended these visits by the clergy because the majority of visiting priests used events taking place outside as a basis for their sermons. This meant that, besides receiving some respite from the monotony of daily prison

\(^{220}\) Buntman, Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid, 3.

\(^{221}\) Ibid.

\(^{222}\) See the references in the Bibliography section of the paper.

duties, the political prisoners would also get welcome information about what was happening outside the prison walls.224

Indres Naidoo, a former inmate on Robben Island, also mentions an incident in which the ministers of religion unknowingly contributed to the prisoners’ access to newspapers, which were not allowed at the time.225 Eddie Daniels corroborates this anecdote by indicating that Brother September, a missionary, was relieved of his newspaper (the Sunday Times) through resourceful manoeuvring of the prisoners to get hold of the paper.226 Further, Naidoo points out that although the prison chaplain (a Dutch Reformed Minister) was hostile to them, the prisoners enjoyed attending his sermons because he gave out news of ‘terrorist activities’ at different places in Southern Africa227 thus enabling them to get news on how the struggle was progressing on the outside.

Different religious festivals were celebrated by those in prison. This is exemplified in the account of one of the former inmates on Robben Island, Lallo (Lalu) Chiba. According to him, one of the ways in which prisoners could escape the monotony of prison food was to observe various religious festivals. He makes mention of celebrating Christmas, Eid and Hindu festivals. What is worthy of note is that prisoners developed ‘fluid religious affiliations’ in an effort to run away from the sameness of prison food since, the various visiting priests who came to the Island were allowed to bring food items to honour specific festivals. So at different times the prisoners became converts of whichever religion that was about to send a representative to the Island.228 This may seem trivial, but to me it indicates that prisoners were prepared to engage any necessary means to meet and interact with people outside to further their quest, which was fighting for freedom from oppression and for freedom of expression.

On the day of the passing of Nelson Mandela, the National Catholic Reporter published an article which showed how important the church was to the prisoners.229 In this article, Peter Storey makes the assertion that the clergy had played an important role in the lives of prisoners, including that of Nelson Mandela, who had an unshakable faith in God. According to this article, this fact was little told but played an essential role in Mandela’s life. This is an

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224 Smith, Robben Island (Cape Town: Struik Publishers, 1997) 120.
225 Naidoo, Island in Chains, 125.
226 Daniels, There and Back, 165.
227 Naidoo, Island in Chains, 143.
228 Anna Trapido, Hunger for Freedom: A Story in the Life of Nelson Mandela’, (Jacana Media: 2009)
indication that those who were imprisoned at Robben Island and the other prisons that held political prisoners turned to a Higher Being to sometimes come to terms with the harshness they were experiencing inside the isolated prisons.\footnote{230 Winnie Graham, ‘Mandela was ever-mindful of church role in South Africa’s struggle’, National Catholic Reporter \url{http://ncronline.org/news/people/mandela-was-ever-mindful-church-role-south-africans-struggle}, downloaded 17 April 2014.}

Although the majority of people who fought against apartheid were those categorized as black, there were a significant number of whites who also joined the struggle and some of them were imprisoned although not alongside their compatriots. However, their treatment was not any better and one of those imprisoned at the Pretoria Prison, Raymond Suttner, who was Jewish, mentions that in the spirit of co-operation and the need to come together, he and his fellow inmates celebrated Christmas as well Passover and the Jewish New Year. He mentions the procurement and making of treats for these celebrations.\footnote{231 Raymond Suttner, \textit{Inside Apartheid’s Prison: Notes and Letters of Struggle}, (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2001) p, 64 and 82.}

Similarly, still at Pretoria Prison, Goldberg mentions incidences like the inmates making cards for special days like Christmas, anniversaries, birthdays, also celebrating Christmas by putting up a ‘Christmas Tree’ fashioned out of a string and painted it green with a red star at the apex. Additionally, the prisoners made a point of doing things for themselves and tried to experience a bit of joy and offer each other support. Food parcels (biscuits, dried fruit, sweets) which were sent to other prisoners were combined and shared with all the prisoners in the block through making individual parcels for each other and placing them under the ‘tree’ and later dinner was made out of tinned food and enjoyed together.\footnote{232 Dennis Goldberg interview conducted by Simply Sunday on CFMO FM in Ottawa, Canada.}

Importantly, it should be noted that it did not matter what was the reason that would bring the prisoners together; what they were most looking forward to was being together as a unit and sharing not only food but also snippets of news of what was happening outside the prison walls. This news could be discussed at length.

Despite the suffering that was endured by the inmates at Robben Island, especially those imprisoned for political misdeeds, the more prominent of the prisoners acknowledged the role of interaction with fellow prisoners, on religious occasions where they provided one another with providing moral support. There were interactions, conversations and discussions where individual and collective problems were discussed. These dealings resulted in giving those
imprisoned a confidence in themselves and also strengthened their spirituality, resulting in freedom from preoccupation with the less than ideal conditions at the prison.233

The inhumane treatment which has plagued the history of Robben Island brings one to thinking that there had to be a way in which those incarcerated on the Island sought to deal with the less than ideal situation in which they found themselves. In recalling his days as a political prisoner on Robben Island, Stanley Mogoba mentions the practice in the African tradition of ensuring that a person who had experienced bereavement was not left alone (community mourning). This however did not happen in the case of individuals in prison and this made any loss of life of loved ones a form of continuing to ‘torture’. It was a denial of basic human rights in an effort to break the perceived ‘terrorists’.234

According to Eddie Daniels the Achilles Heel of the Nationalist government was the claim that they were Christians and actually if one went to them with a religious request…based on religious grounds it was readily granted. “So the minister of my church Reverend McCrystal, he made a request that he be allowed to say a prayer with me, although no one’s allowed to come see you in detention the officials allowed him, made an exception. One day the door to the cell just opened and the minister escorted by 2 security police came in and said that he had been allowed to come say a prayer with me.”235 In this way Eddie indicates that he received news about how his family was dealing with his arrest. This assisted him to feel a lot better and dispelled the depression that he had felt prior to the priest’s visit.

As a 28-year-old Catholic priest, Father Brendon Long, was appointed chaplain to Robben Island, after spending some at St. Mary’s Cathedral on the mainland. At the time of his appointment he was not aware that his appointment would last more than two years, however this also brought him into close contact with a man who was to become one of the world’s most respected leaders. The weekly ferry trips to the Island and back to hold services for the prisoners resulted in a friendship with Nelson Mandela, albeit under the watchful eye of the warder, that was assigned to the high security block at the time of the priest’s visit.236

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233 Smith, Robben Island, 5.
234 Mmutlanyane S. Mogoba, Faith on Robben Island – Steel, Steel and Sjambok (Johannesburg: Ziningweni Communications 2003), 16.
The priest indicates that although he was Catholic, services that were held for the prisoners were non-denominational because they held different beliefs, even though provision was made for confessions to be heard for those who were Catholic. Additionally, he indicated that Mandela and his fellow inmates attended services on a regular basis, with Mandela occasionally reading his favourite passages from the scriptures. Although the state accused a majority of those imprisoned for political activities of being communists, Father Brendan remembers Mandela saying to him “If I were a communist I would have not read the scripture.”

Not only did Mandela enjoy reading the scriptures, he also had a favourite book of spiritual devotion, Thomas Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, which impressed him so much that he read it more than once.

Even though Denis Goldberg was not imprisoned on Robben Island because the apartheid government categorized him as white, he was imprisoned at the same time as the likes of Mandela, Mbeki and Sisulu, as he was part of what came to known as the Rivonia 8 trialists, the only white amongst the eight. He served his sentence at Pretoria Prison and his thoughts about his imprisonment were that White prisoners were given a very hard time in prison as the warders saw them as betraying their own race. Unlike the oppressed blacks whose leaders were given a grudging respect, as they were seen to be fighting for the improvement of their fellow Africans’ lives, whites could be said to be involving themselves in a fight that was not theirs and were thus treated more harshly than their black comrades.

Goldberg continues by indicating that although he was sentenced to life imprisonment, he did not lose hope but drew strength from his political commitment and didn’t feel guilty as he felt he and his comrades had not done anything morally wrong, thus he did not see himself as a criminal. Although at times prison was sometimes depressing and one could be left to their own devices for up to 17 hours a day, this solitude helped him to learn patience, tolerance, caring and better interaction with people when the occasion was presented.

According to Goldberg, loneliness was one of the things that was most difficult while in prison because one was away from loved ones. Being in isolation for the majority of the twenty-years that he spent in prison, he also viewed prison as an emotional desert. It was also not easy to express emotions but when one eventually opened up, it was viewed not as a sign

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237 Dennis Goldberg interview conducted by Simply Sunday on CFMO FM in Ottawa, Canada.
238 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
of weakness but a sign of strength. It became better when he was able to talk to other prisoners after long episodes of being alone.²⁴⁰

Like the other Rivonia trialists, some of the coping strategies that Goldberg talks about include taking imprisonment one day at a time, not looking beyond what was happening in the present. Secondly, putting up a cheerful face, looking at the life sentence in a positive light and always holding on to the belief that some day he would be released. The only book which was allowed in the cells was a Bible, however, the warders also allowed the prisoners access to the prison library, where they managed to get books, although censored.

Other than Christian priests, there is also evidence that there were Hindu church leaders who came to visit prisoners on Robben Island. Eddie Daniels recalls that an Indian priest would visit the prisoners and offer spiritual morale-boost to them. Even non-Indians attended these sermons. This was done for two reasons; firstly, as a way for the inmates to get a morale boost and to be outside their cells for some time; secondly the prisoners would also use this opportunity to get news of what was happening outside. This was done through praying in Guajarati which was foreign to most, but not to Lallo Chiba, Billy Nair and Ahmed Kathrada; this prayer included in it news of what was happening outside. Later on, after the priest had left, the news would be translated the other prisoners who did not understand the language.²⁴¹

Apart from this, Daniels also indicates that a large majority of inmates attended sermons given by different priests from different religious groupings, singling out Anglican, Moslem, Roman Catholic, Methodist and Hindu. Also, when Diwali, which is a Hindu festival, came around once a year, about 15 out of 30 prisoners accommodated on B Section would get care packages containing sweets, biscuits chocolate, etc. from church members. These items were seen as an added benefit as the items were not normally available in abundance and they would share the treats with those who had not attended.²⁴²

Not only was there western religion present on the Island, but Coetzee, in his book which collected some experiences of ex-political prisoners, indicates that there was also evidence of African traditional practices, which were also performed in an attempt to make the lives of those imprisoned a little better. For instance, Johnson Malcom Mgabela, who had been on the Island since 1964, recalls that once his comrades found out that he was Ingcibi (a person who

²⁴⁰ Dennis Goldberg interview conducted by Simply Sunday on CFMO FM in Ottawa, Canada.
²⁴¹ Eddie Daniels Interview with Wolfie Kodesh
²⁴² Ibid
performs traditional circumcisions) on the outside, he got asked to continue with his work while on the inside. A lot of the African inmates asked him to perform this ritual on them and he also looked after them until their wounds were healed. According to his narration he started doing the circumcisions around June/July 1974 in total performing around ± 361 circumcisions on inmates who, had he not been around, might not have had the opportunity to undergo this important transition from boyhood to manhood because of their incarceration. This action ensured that the men got peace of mind and respect they would have otherwise not gotten had they remained ‘boys’. This ritual was performed in secret as it is done on the outside.243

He indicates that he stopped around mid-1981 as his sentence was nearing completion and there had been a leak (prison warders had found out about this practice). During the time that he was performing this ritual, he followed all customary guidelines as if he was on the outside. This included giving training to the ‘initiates’ on the correct way of thinking and doing things as well as assisting them to act like grown-up men not boys and also to accept discipline prior to undergoing the ritual.244

Another point that is mentioned by Father Orobator is that although Mandela believed in God, he was not an enthusiast of organised religion but “like any astute politician, he knew the place of religion in politics and was not averse to using it as much as was necessary”. He had a number of notable religious figures as his friends and also put trust on the support of the joining together of varied religious traditions in the long-drawn endeavours of those working towards take apart the apartheid system.245

244 Ibid, 50.
CHAPTER 2

STORIES OF RELIGION ON ROBBEN ISLAND DURING THE POLITICAL IMPRISONMENT ERA

The stories behind the practising of religion in South African prisons and the manner in which it was manipulated are varied and a little repressed. As I have indicated been in the previous chapter, imprisonment at that time in South Africa was a form repressing people’s freedom of expression and speech and their fight for enfranchisement. After the advent of democratic rule in the country, the narrative which was popularised for the newly democratic nation was that of succeeding against the odds that faced those repressed.

This section of the paper could have not been produced without the assistance of the ex-political prisoners who took time to sit with me and relate their experiences while incarcerated on Robben Island. Although due to time constraints I was not able to talk to a lot of them, the few that I managed to interview as well as the use of the different literatures which were utilised, also put into perspective the manner in which religion was used and manipulated in an attempt to make the lives of the prisoners more bearable.

One of the EPP’s who was interviewed is Mr. Thulani Mabaso, who is currently working at Robben Island as a Tour Guide Co-ordinator. He recalled his experience of being on the Island from 1986 to 1991 as being bad. The bad conditions that he specifically mentioned were that they were given ‘bad’ food, the poor accommodations as well as the fact that the water that they bathed in was harsh on their skins because of the high salt content. This was also confirmed by Mr. Bafo Nguqu, who was imprisoned on the Island from 1987 to 1990 He indicated that although the conditions were better in the 1980s than in previous decades, they were still less than ideal; for example, the prison officials attempted to implement the principle of divide and rule through giving Africans and non-Africans different food, but this failed because the prisoners shared whatever food they had amongst themselves so that all ate the same thing. Mabaso also went on to mention that they were

246 Ex Political Prisoner
247 In the oral interview with Bafo Nguqu on the 23rd September 2014, he corroborates this through indicating that ‘...the food has never been good in prison...’; Vincent Diba, another ex-political prisoner, interviewed on the 07th October 2014 also indicated that the food was bad.
248 Oral interview with Thulani Mabaso conducted by the writer on 12 September 2014.
249 Oral interview with Bafo Nguqu conducted by the writer on the 23rd September 2014.
put together in cells regardless of their political persuasion, but they knew how to treat each other with respect.

On the question of religion, all the EPP’s interviewed indicated that even before being incarcerated, they were practising Christians, although this was affected by the period when they were undergoing military training, even though they tried to pray every day. Mabaso recalls that there was a time when the only book which was available to him to read was the Bible and being solitary he ‘…read it [the Bible] from Genesis to the last book…[he also] used to count the number of words on the pages’ just to get through the loneliness. This is also confirmed by Indres Naidoo in his interview with Wolfie Kodesh. Reading the Bible helped Mabaso because he compared the struggles that the biblical people went through to the struggles that they were undergoing in South Africa. The hardships that he read about helped and encouraged him to deal with his incarceration, and to hold on to the belief that what they were fighting for would be realised; that is why he kept his faith.

Mr Vincent Diba, who was imprisoned on the Island from 1983 to 1991, mentions the fact that a limited number of prisoners from each section, only 7 in number, were allowed to attend the weekly sermons that were held for the prisoners by the priests who came to visit the Island. The only time that the numbers were not limited was during Eid, where the prisoners would be allowed to share the food brought over from the mainland. He also indicated that he did not think the presence of the priests resulted in any boosting of morale. In his opinion, the prisoners just saw it as a change of scenery from their usual life.

There were priests who came to visit the prisoners in the prison every week. They were not aligned to any denomination; they just came and prayed with all the prisoners not separating them by denomination. Mabaso recalls that during Christmas time the priests would bring them (prisoners) some sacrament. They however encountered difficulty in attempting to attend these sermons because they had to apply in order to do so, but they were not prepared to apply.

They argued that they did not require permission to attend sermons and pray, so they opted to pray in their individual sections. In the event of attending the sermons, afterwards they held

250 Oral interviews with Thulani Mabaso, Bafo Nguqu, Vincent Diba and Vusmuzi Mcongo.
251 Oral history interview with Indres Naidoo conducted by Wolfie Kodesh.
252 Oral interview with Thulani Mabaso conducted by the writer on the 12th September 2014.
253 Oral Interview with Vincent Diba conducted with the writer on the 7th October 2014.
254 Interviews with Nguqu and Mabaso.
discussions relating to the priests’ message. Those who had different beliefs were not treated any differently and their beliefs were respected, no one was forced to believe in what the majority believed in.  

Bafo Nguqu, a former political prisoner on the Island, mentions that the visits by the priests were welcomed by the prisoners although there were some who did not identify with a particular church or religion for various reasons, for example, being communist or believing in sangomas (traditional African healers)

The fact that the prisoners practised their beliefs, even though they had different beliefs, made their time on the Island better. Mabaso contends that the conditions were made better by the inmates even going to the extent of influencing the outlook of the warders who as indicated in the preceding chapter had been indoctrinated into believing that their charges were terrorists and unbelievers. Thus religion was used as an instrument to change the outlook warders had towards their charges. This to some extent succeeded. Mabaso showed that some of the warders even became sympathetic towards the prisoners.

Regardless of the harsh conditions in which the prisoners found themselves while on the Island, morale in prison was improved and even the warders were won over through the attempts of the prisoners to change their (warders) outlook towards them. Although Mabaso says that he sometimes became discouraged, he told himself that he would persevere because he had the belief that life would change for the better and this made him not to lose faith.

Mabaso also mentions that the visits of the priests were also used in some unconventional ways. For example, he mentions that visits by a Reverend September were used as a way to relay messages to people on the outside. The prisoners would give the messages to the priest and they (messages) would be passed on to the pertinent people on the outside. Nguqu also shows that inmates from his section used to go to these sermons and used them as a way of meeting with other inmates from different sections and to send or receive messages from the other sections.

255 Taken from the interview with Thulani Mabaso.  
256 Traditional African healing.  
257 Mabaso also argues that the warders were indoctrinated and he goes on to pray for them because ‘they did not know what they were doing’.
Furthermore, Reverend September used quotations from the Bible to tell the inmates about what was going on outside prison. This point is also confirmed by Nguqu, who indicated that inmates went to the sermons in order to get some information about what was going on outside the prison, sometimes even bringing the prisoners some newspapers, because, according Nguqu, the priests’ bags were not searched. This is an indication of how religion was not only used to raise the morale of the prisoners but also of being manoeuvred to meet the requirements of the prisoners.

However, when this came to the notice of the officials, they began to limit the numbers of priests coming to the Island and replaced them with military chaplains, who were seen as being part of the system which had placed the men in incarceration. But even the outlook of the chaplains gradually, changed because they (chaplains) came to the prison with an attitude that the were coming to prison to visit criminals and terrorists but instead found people who were mature and intellectually active. The prisoners used the excuse of religion just to be with people from outside and also to move away from always being locked up, as meetings with priests took place in the hall.

Bafo Nguqu did not feel as though the visits of the priests made that much of a difference to the morale of the prisoners, because he said that, in his experience he had not come across someone who felt that their life had been changed by the priests’ visits because they came to talk about the Bible that the majority of prisoners had already read from back to front. So, other than the fact that the visits were a welcome interruption to the tedious routine of prison life, he did not see the visits as being influential in boosting inmate morale.

Even though he (Nguqu) did not identify with a particular church while on Robben Island, he continued to pray while on the Island and always held the belief that his prayers and the efforts of people on the outside of prison who prayed for the inmates eventually led to the attainment of their release from prison. This and his belief in the Creator helped him to hold on to the belief that no matter how long the fight for liberation lasted, they would one day be liberated.

Oral interview with Thulani Mabaso conducted by the writer on the 12th September 2014.
Reverend Stanley Mogoba recalls that he was one of the prisoners who started working on the Blue Stone Quarry which produced stone used to build the new prison that would be used to house the political prisoners on the Island. He mentions that the working conditions at the quarry site were very harsh with the new arrivals bearing the brunt of hardships. They had cut and bruised hands which sometimes became infected. On the positive side, there was camaraderie of spirit with those who had been on Quarry longer attempting to help the new arrivals, giving advice on how to go about their work in a manner which would be less difficult. The prisoners aimed to create some sort of community, making new friends and renewing acquaintances which had been interrupted when their comrades were arrested.259

Mogoba (Prisoner number 20/64) talks about the epiphany which led to him to abandoning his on-going law studies with the University of South Africa to become a minister of the Gospel. He recounts that one Sunday a minister visited the Isolation section where he was being held in punishment and was preaching in the passage as he wasn’t allowed to talk to the prisoners individually.260 Before leaving the section, the minister left gospel tracts which were distributed to all prisoners and Mogoba was able use this to interpret the Xhosa Bible which had been provided to him by the prison official whilst in solitary confinement. Without this he was unable to read it because he did not understand Xhosa. The ministering epiphany was the positive aspect of the confinement was as well as learning to read Xhosa.261

According to Mr. Vusumzi Mcongo, who was imprisoned on the Island from 1978 to 1990, on the prisoners’ arrival on the Island, religion was not specifically mentioned. They were asked about what activities got them arrested and which political organization did they identify with. However, Mcongo mentioned that, during the time that they were still on trial prior to their conviction, priests came and ministered to them. While on the Island, the priests who came to the minister to the prisoners were arranged by the system after being vetted by the government.262

Mcongo went on to show that initially the prisoners were very sceptical of the ministers. He recalled an incident where one of his Namibian fellow prisoners identified one of the ministers from the Dutch Reformed Church as having been present during his interrogation in detention. It was incidents like this which made the prisoners less trusting of some of the

259 Mogoba, Faith on Robben Island – Steel, Steel and Sjambok, 24.
260 Mogoba, Faith on Robben Island – Steel, Steel and Sjambok, 47.
261 Ibid, 48.
262 Oral interview with Vusumzi Mcongo conducted by the writer on the 23rd September 2014.
priests who came to visit the Prison. Hence the scepticism and critical approach that the prisoners had; although those who chose to attend church services were not stopped and those who chose not go were not criticised by their comrades.263

Mcongo further indicated that although there were ministers from different denominations who came to the Island, the Dutch Reformed, Anglican, Lutheran and Moslems priests were the most frequent visitors to the prison during his stay. The prisoners attended all the church services regardless of their own affiliations, as they did not see one denomination as being better than the other.264 This is an example of the fluidity of affiliation that is mentioned by Lalio Chiba in the previous chapter.

This happened even though according to Mcongo most prisoners did not particularly believe in organised religion ‘…because the churches were at arm’s length especially in the struggle’. However particular individuals within the churches were very supportive. He believed that churches played a pivotal role for the prisoners through enabling the prisoners, who had limited communication with their families, to relay messages through some of the priests who used to come to the Island. Also the churches conducted marriage ceremonies between the prisoners and their partners. This started happening only in the late 1980’s. Churches were seen an important link between the prisoners and their families.265

Another recollection that Mcongo related was that the prisoners had ‘means and ways’ of how to get newspapers from the priests’ bags. This would be done during the time when the assembled prisoners were closing their eyes in prayer. He emphasised the fact that the only thing that was taken out of the bag would be the newspaper; the minister would be aware of what was happening and the warder, who was always present, would be distracted while this was happening. Also during Holy Communion, the prisoners would take this opportunity to pass along something to the priest for onward transmission to their families on the outside.

Although he grew up in a Christian family, Mcongo said that he had later concentrated on the struggle, and the church went on the back-burner. However, it was when imprisoned that he realised that churches had an important role to play in the struggle. In his words ‘oppressed people are the opium of religion and they are found in large numbers in the church’. Thus even though he saw religion as an ‘idealistic way of thinking’ it became a revelation because

263 Oral interview with Vusumzi Mcongo conducted by the writer on the 23rd September 2014.
264 Ibid.
265 Ibid.
they (those involved in the struggle) could reach out to the oppressed and mobilise them to join in fighting for liberation.\textsuperscript{266}

In his opinion the important role that the church and religion had to play in the wider society could not be side-lined; however, the problems arose in cases where the prisoners felt they were being forced to practise a particular religion. This resulted in them rebelling against this coercion, similar to the fight that had brought them to prison in the first place.

\textsuperscript{266} Oral interview with Vusumzi Mcongo conducted by the writer on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} September 2014.
CONCLUSION

Religion was used to justify the conquest of "backward" people and, later on used to substantiate the implementation of apartheid as a system of government. On the other hand, African resistance to European conquest drew conceptions of liberty from religion. For this reason, throughout the history of the relationships of blacks and whites in South Africa, religion has been used as an ideology of both oppression and resistance.267

Based on the literature consulted as well as on the interviews conducted, it is quite evident that on Robben Island religion was not only used in the expected manner to ease the harsh conditions in which the political prisoners found themselves in; besides this, there were also some ingenious machinations undertaken by those in prison in an endeavour to sabotage the attempts of the apartheid regime to make their lives unbearable.

This paper has attempted to utilise memory and experience to explain how the practice and manipulation of religion were put to use during the struggle for democratic rule in South Africa. I believe that some aspects of the political prisoners’ experiences have not been given enough emphasis. Rassool argues that in post-apartheid South Africa, the newly emerging nation sought to define itself through creating a history with which the nation could identify.

In order to achieve this, museums of the new nation; of which the Robben Island Museum was the first, created narratives which would resonate with the emerging nation and its rhetoric of ‘the triumph of the human spirit’.268 The need of the newly emerging democratic nation to create new histories which were testament to overcoming the suffering that South Africans underwent during apartheid led to the creation of narratives of victory and the use of the name and biography of Mandela to portray an image of a nation that was on the road to reconciliation.

As it has been intimated in the introductory chapter of this paper, my task in producing this paper was to endeavour to look at the influences of religion as a way of coping with the


difficult conditions on Robben Island. Furthermore, the impetus for attempting to look at this angle is that most of the literature consulted concentrated on the role that sports and political discussions had on the morale of the prisoners, but not much is written about the role of religion on the Island and how the prisoners might have used and perhaps manipulated religion in an effort to improve on the conditions in which they found themselves. In cases where religion was mentioned in the literature I consulted, this was done in passing and required one to be actively on the lookout for it.

It is my belief that little emphasis is put on the importance of this facet of the Island’s history, probably because it does not tie in with the theme of ‘triumph of the human spirit over adversity’ as there are elements that can be seen to portray a certain kind of weakness. I say this because the ex-prisoners in talking about their religious experiences mention aspects which might elicit feelings of pity and sympathy from their audiences, which goes against the grain of the dominant narrative. The dominant rhetoric is that those who had been on Robben Island silently endured the harsh conditions experienced there, however in consulting the interviews conducted and literature written about experiences on the Island, various indicated that they were at times discouraged. Based on the oral testimonies which were shared with me through personal interviews, the written narration of experiences of some of the ex-political prisoners and those kept at the Mayibuye Archives Audio-Visual Section, I have concluded that the spiritual experiences of these ex-prisoners is important and should be incorporated into the rich tapestry of Robben Island’s narrative.

I believe bringing to light this aspect of the narrative of Robben Island will be beneficial. Helena Pohlandt-McComick has suggested that suppressing or erasing some memories can result in an inability to heal and the repressed experiences, especially those of a traumatic nature, can continue to harm those who experienced them to the extent that they are unable to function effectively in society as they have been robbed of an opportunity to deal with the events that led to the disruption experienced in their lives. They may be unable to ‘find continuity and meaning’.

Furthermore, Pohlandt-McComick mentions that in consciously manipulating the telling of past, a regime might be seen as being guilty of creating historical myths which are not beneficial to the population. This might lead to what she terms a ‘replicat(ion) of social

relations based on oppression and expropriation by race’. Memory can thus be a tool which can be used to excavate these silences from the doldrums of repressed history.

Interacting with actions traumatic events that happened in the past can also benefit not only the people who experienced them but also the collective to which the individuals belong. Moreover the act of telling the stories of the past are also dependent on the age in the time the event happened and the time it is retold and time between the event and its recounting and this will result in a finer distinction of memories which constitute social history of the collective.271

It can thus be concluded that engaging with the stories behind the experiences during the time of political turmoil in South Africa can be beneficial to not only those individuals but also for posterity.

270 Ibid, 28.
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Oral interview with Vusumzi Mcongo conducted by the writer on the 23rd September 2014.
PAUSING AT THE PHOTOGRAPHIC THRESHOLDS IN ROBBEN ISLAND
MUSEUM NARRATIVES

BY

RI’AAD DOLLIE

Figure 1. Still from Schadeberg (1994) depicting a group portrait of the exiled "Kafir chiefs", some of their wives and other prisoners in front of a tarpaulin-covered reed hut on Murray's Bay, Robben Island, in 1859. (D. Wangemann: drawings of two mission journeys to South Africa, National Library of South Africa). The engraving is based on the photograph attributed to A. Green and has been used as the visual link between 19th Century political prisoners on the Island and the Rivonia Trialists in the current heritage narrative presented at the Robben Island Museum.
INTRODUCTION

Liminality is either interpreted to refer to the in-between spaces – those spaces that are between destinations - or refers to an altered state of consciousness experienced in *rites de passage*. In this paper, I explore the convergence of both these understandings and suggest that liminality can be used to describe a key characteristic of how photographs work. I suggest that photographs themselves are key operators of liminality. This visual essay is the first chapter of a research paper that explores the concept of liminality in the representation of heritage narratives at Robben Island Museum (RIM).

The second chapter of this research paper tries to locate why understanding how photographs work is important to the development of progressive museum practice and a critical heritage discourse that leans into difference and re-thinks institutional "intangible heritage", by which I mean the ideological practices that have shaped the emergence of the museum as an essential component of the exhibitionary complex in coloniality and modernity - how taxonomies, collection and display strategies, as well as approaches to memory and archive have shaped the historical role of museums in nation-building, identity politics and the making of publics in the modern nation state. The relationship between heritage and history, and the imagining of future polities, in the globalized pressure on museums to become destinations that package and commodify heritage products begs a reconsideration: away from a "bricks-and-mortar" conception of the museum and toward a view of the institution as a spatio-temporal artefact that like all cultural artefacts, is dynamic and fluid and has more to do with the process of knowledge production, social relations and constellations of power and authority and thus demands democratization. The second chapter concludes by exploring the issues around curatorial authority and the curation of "difficult knowledge" which led to my curation of an exhibition titled "Bunny chatter: Robben Island to Marikana".
CHAPTER ONE

On photography

Photographs have the potential to facilitate access to altered states and they do so by presenting the viewer a threshold, or *limen*, to participate and experience a spatial-temporal break through memory and the assemblage of narratives that reach from the warp of private personal experiences to tapestries of national identity.

This chapter looks at the integral role played by the photographic in representations of heritage at Robben Island Museum. It examines themes in the history of photography in an exhibition currently installed at the Nelson Mandela Gateway (Naude, 2014) titled "Away from view" and a documentary film entitled “Voices from Robben Island” (Schadeberg, 1994). The medium of monumentalized, wall-sized, representation is a thematic in the RIM narrative and this will be explored in the Mural Exhibit installed at the Nelson Mandela Gateway and at a mural installed at the jetty on Murray's Bay welcoming visitors to the museum. The first panel of this mural, is a photograph of the "Kafir chiefs" who were imprisoned on the Island in the 19th Century and through this photograph we access the deep history of political incarceration on the Island. The biographical narrative represented in the rest of the welcoming panels makes the link between these early political prisoners and the Rivonia Trialists explicit and then casts this biographical narrative as the national narrative of the liberation struggle against Apartheid. The first chapter will only explore the first panel and the photographs in the rest of the panel will be researched in the second chapter of the research paper and frame that discussion in the wider context of critical heritage discourse and the contestation of meanings and knowledge production, the transformation of the museum and a discussion on curatorial authority in the visual economy of the museum.
**Pausing at the limen**

Sey (2011: 6) suggests that there is a relationship between the liminal and marginality:

"The concept of the liminal refers to the state of the threshold. That which is liminal exists in an in-between state, not fully realised, fully understood or fully accepted into the *socius*. Things and beings which exist in a liminal state are properly at the margins, often not accorded a full legal, epistemological or psychological identity. As such, they acquire a range of different meanings and functions in society. Liminal spaces are those in which the normal rules and mores of society are suspended, thus allowing for transformation and new confluences to happen".

Spaces opened by the liminal threshold, or *limen*, by the photographic, are voids that can be populated by multiple and often conflicting representations. How images are framed determine the *limen*. Where and how the threshold is encountered may limit or encourage interpretation and may construct deep, new memories or confirm old ones. Where they are placed, the format in which they are presented, the presence or absence of declared authorship, and how they interpolate with text and other images further shapes interpretation.

Nour Dados (2010) explores the liminality of photographs and declares that she "was struck by the way that the threshold between image and narrative could be encapsulated in the simplicity of a photograph". Dados pauses at the *limen*, and so does this visual essay. It is at the *limen*, at the threshold, in a two-dimensional plane, in which we encounter the photographic. It is here that Dados proceeds to posit a number of questions about how photographs and narratives intersect. The following extract illustrates the portal-like opportunity presented by the *limen* and the questions Dados addresses in grappling with what happens at the threshold. It forms the touchstone of the approach I am attempting in this paper:

“The photograph throws up the threshold as a possibility and a challenge, but do we ever really pass the threshold of the photograph – the moment, the artefact, the stillness – to reach that other place? Where is it that we expect to go when we do? Perhaps we think photographs will allow us access to the paths of memory, to the
scene of a crime, or that they will take us on a voyage to a distant place, to visit sites of cultural significance, or on a promenade down the avenues of history. But how does one enter and leave a photograph and where do we go when we do? Is the surface of the photograph really a threshold that can take us beyond the image? When we speak of ‘animating’ photographs, we are referring to processes that take place in this liminal zone where stillness becomes movement, moment becomes narrative, and artefact becomes memory. If the threshold of the photograph begins at the surface, what relationship does it have to the gaze, to the interpretative reflex, to the tricks of perception? Does the gaze graze the threshold of the photograph and bring us into another space or does it merely transform our desire to name, decode and classify into a narrative that takes the place of the image? What does the photograph tell us about the spatial and temporal dimensions of the threshold? How can the photograph lead us to a theorisation of the state on the threshold?”

**Figure 2.** Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1957 (In Hashem el Madani. Studio Practices: An ongoing project by Akram Zaatari / The Arab Image Foundation)
Liminality experienced in rites-of-passage ceremonies – that in-between space where a new subjectivity is coming into being - a breach where resilient identity is suspended and cohabits with a morphing identity has been used to help us understand spaces like airports, stations and harbours: neither here nor there, portals to somewhere else or can "range from disputed political territories, to asylums and internment camps, to shrines, caves, seashores and crossroads"(Sey, 2011: 6). I would like to see how liminality can be used to explore how space is used and manipulated in the construction of heritage narratives and move forward with the concept to explore how it can be used to describe shared experiences or shared, liminal experiences – or what Victor Turner refers to as “communitas” (http:\www.anthrobase.com\Dic\eng\def\communitas.htm).

This chapter focuses on the liminal as a characteristic of the photograph, and exercises its efficacy with one photograph in particular: "The Kafir chiefs on Robben Island". The second chapter (of the research paper) will explore how the anthropological understanding of liminality can be used to understand how wider heritage narratives and even nationalistic master narratives are constructed and the integral role that the invocation of "altered states" plays in representations of national identity. The photographs used in the rest of the welcoming panels will form the focus of the next chapter.

AWAY FROM VIEW

Space and spatial position are concepts not often figured much into heritage studies. We take space for granted; yet it is space that we occupy and is a fundamental means through which the world is lived and experienced. It gives us a point of view. Aesthetic choices are made about where exhibitions are staged. Space is weighed and quantified and value is imputed to exhibits based on where they are placed. The exhibition, "Away from view", takes us on a journey into photography and how the essentialized point-of-view, of the photographer-subject-viewer, over determines how the photographic is interpreted.

Robben Island Museum is constantly re-inventing itself, and as the first statutory national museum of the post-apartheid era, it too has many heritage layers. This section focuses on one in particular: its role as laboratory for post-apartheid heritage practice and how the
aesthetic choices in curatorial experiments in exhibits structure the heritage narrative emerging at RIM.

Naude’s exhibition is entitled “Away from view” and is installed in a prominent but unobvious space at the Gateway with very little signage inviting traffic to explore these spaces. It is a thought-provoking exhibition that provides us with insights into the many layers of photographic discourse and its deployment at RIM.

Naude (2014) declares her intent on one of the wall-mounted information boards at the entrance to the exhibition space:

“My contention is that the photographic image bears traces of the moment captured which could induce a recalling of past experiences, yet, as threshold between the instant moment and the (immediate) past, the liminal character of the photograph creates a constant flux with regard to its meaning. This critical analysis is based on visual research where the medium of photography has been used to examine itself. What I hoped to achieve was an improved understanding of the fascinating process that occurs inside the camera. The fundamental principles regarding the functions of light within photography have not changed since the advent of the most basic photographic device, namely the camera obscura, a large format of the pinhole camera. This device is very simply a contained darkened space pierced by a small hole. On the opposite inside wall of this darkened space a light-sensitive medium is placed or fixed to capture the light emitted into the space through the aperture”.
Installed on Level One is a pin-hole or box camera or camera *obscura*, which is constructed to the exact dimensions of a single-prison cell at the Maximum Security Prison on Robben Island. You can walk into it and seal out all light except that which enters through a pinhole in one wall of the reconstructed cell. Once the eyes adjust, an investment of at least five minutes is required, you see an inverted image of the V&A Waterfront vista cast on to the wall of the cell opposite the pinhole. The same technology was used in an actual prison cell on the Island to produce images of the Island. The inverted image was captured on to photographic paper and the positives and negatives of the images are presented in the exhibition as well as some digital photographs of the process.

**Figure 3.** View of the departure atrium at the Nelson Mandela Gateway before the first ferry passengers arrive. The mezzanine is on Level One and the exhibition, “Away from view” by Irene Naude, is partially concealed by a translucent banner depicting a photograph of Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu on Robben Island - this photograph was taken on an officially sanctioned and staged media tour of the prison. (Photograph by the author: 2014).
This view of the Island almost perfectly mimics the current tension in the transformation of Robben Island Museum, whose primary focus has been on the living heritage of the political prisoner experience, and is shifting to the wider heritage ecology of the Island as a world heritage site. So it represents a very particular point of view, the view of the Island as refracted through a pinhole in a prison cell wall. It almost cannibalizes the landscape and metabolizes it in a “museumification” process. The images are hazy and unstable and definitely fabricated, not real. The cannibalistic mechanism is used in a similar way at many sites on the Island where a black-and-white photograph of the site with text informs the viewer of what they are standing in front of – the cairn, the kramat - like a realist photograph not just verifying this information for the viewer but also assisting in museumifying the site itself. The black-and white photograph signals museumification and is presented as a component of the Island’s heritage script. Blue information board with photograph equals heritage site. This happens across the site and is a key component in the Island’s current heritage vernacular.

Figure 4. Camera Obscura installation on Level One at Nelson Mandela Gateway, From the exhibition: "Away from View".
(Photograph by the author: 2014).
This singular point of view, integral to things photographic, generates questions around representation, authority and authenticity. The issue of representation in the photographic is a key component in the visual economy of RIM’s heritage landscape and Naude’s exhibition allows us to access some of the deep tensions in the history of photography.

**Figure 5.** Positive and Negative images of Robben Island as captured by a prison cell operated as a camera *obscura* in the exhibition “Away from view” at the Nelson Mandela Gateway. (Photograph by the author: 2014).
Originary mists

The exhibition takes us to a time when “photographic desire” impelled experimenters to risk working with hazardous, unstable heavy metals to fix treacherously shifty images generated in the camera obscura. It takes us deep into the originary mists of photography’s history, which for a very long time was appropriated in Euro-centric and inventor-based discourses.

Behrend (2013) develops an approach that decentres this Western discourse and confidently argues that the “global medium” of photography is inherently heterogeneous – its ‘invention’, a cross-pollination of Moorish mathematics concerned with the theory of light and its convergence with the development of the linear perspective in Renaissance Italy via the camera obscura. For Behrend, photography’s earliest beginnings, including the technologies, was a global enterprise and with regard to the historiography of the photographic, she calls for an “ethnography of photographic practices” that “bring in perspectives from other cultural spaces that may shift, illuminate, and complement understandings of the medium” (2013: 14-17).

Behrend’s (2013: 16) project to localize photographic practices by connecting it with “pre-existing media, aesthetics, and practice… as act, image and object” is exactly what Batchen (2006) sets out to do: an ethnographic investigation of photography’s genesis in Western Europe. Batchen argues that “the desire to photograph emerges from a confluence of cultural forces rather than from the genius of any one individual” (2002:16). He argues that the cathartic changes wrought by the move to modernity destabilized the worldview associated with the Age of Enlightenment – the emergence of nation states, global trade, advances in scientific and economic realms - and created an environment in which an “epistemological crisis” occurred (2002:18). For Batchen, “photographic desire” represents a “discursive practice” in which the “dull gray of what everyone at a particular period might repeat” (2002:5). He confirms this with a roll call of “proto-photographers” all claiming to be the inventors of modern photography. Batchen then moves on to explore the nature of the epistemological crisis by investigating the “self-reflexive doublet” (2002: 19) that photography polemicizes: “landscape, nature, and the camera image on the one hand, and space, time, and subjectivity on the other” (2002: 18). In psycho-analytical terms, Batchen suggests, “(d)esire… is produced in the gap between need and demand”.
On the one hand, the need to stabilize subjectivities and a new, emerging economy of ‘things’ heralds the ‘desire’ to ‘fix’ things with photography while on the other, photography reveals the discursive relationship between nature and culture which he discloses in his closer reading of Talbot and Daguerre, two prominent claimants in the inventor discourse. In Talbot’s photographic process, which sometimes involved ‘displacing’ objects in order to exploit optimum lighting conditions, Batchen suggests that Talbot emphasizes the “emblematic” over the “naturalistic” possibilities of photographic representation. Batchen argues that for Talbot, “photography is neither natural nor cultural, but rather than economy that incorporates, produces, and is simultaneously produced by both nature and culture, both reality and representation” (2002:10). Similarly, quoting Daguerre: “The DAGUERREOTYPE is not merely an instrument which serves to draw on Nature; on the contrary it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself” (Ibid: 11-12). Batchen concludes that for both Daguerre and Talbot, the primary subject of “every photograph is time itself”, which he refers to as “time anxiety” (Ibid: 15).

The desire to freeze time, to record moments, to capture nature-culture using nature-culture, during a time of rapid destabilization could be construed as the conservative impulse of “photographic desire”. Daguerre’s vision that the “imprint of nature would reproduce itself” refers to his belief that the accessibility of his revolutionary technology would democratize image-making and be globally accessible took two centuries to materialize. His technology was obsolete very soon but photographic technological development continues unabated and we now live Daguerre’s vision.

Photography involves the generation of subjectivities and it does so by objectifying things – almost double entendre. Objectification, and representation, are at the heart of the medium and it is not surprising that this was conflated with objectivity and hence the rapid deployment of the medium as a technology of scientific inquiry. So photography, like the emerging discipline of anthropology, had as its modus operandi, “othering”. But this was not to be an easy fit.

In the course of its popularization in Western Europe, photography was also used to explore the spirit world. The relationship between light and shadow, facilitated an early relationship with ‘theologies’ of light. The making corporeal of things spiritual using the mechanism of
photography is one of the important legacies of photography’s genesis and how this plays out when it comes into contact with local cosmologies that do not centre light but prefer shadow and venerate movement, yields interesting new subjectivities, that provide clues to new discourses in photography as it travels across time and seas during the course of the 19th Century.

"Away from view" engages the deep history of the photographic and the hosting of this exhibition at the Nelson Mandela Gateway is nothing short of a curatorial windfall. There are issues around the exhibition's intellectual pitch and its accessibility but it indicates an institutional willingness and capacity to academically engage heritage practices, like the use of the photographic, with confident reflexivity. The exhibition unfortunately, to date, has not had the traffic it deserves and has been viewed by few. It sets out to question the taken-for-granted-ness of photographic images and does so very cleverly by reflecting on how photographs present particular points of view that extend into their framing in heritage narratives.

**VOICES FROM ROBBEN ISLAND**

In the opening sequence to Jurgen Schadeberg’s “Voices from Robben Island” (1994) he uses an architectural model of Robben Island’s maximum security prison to photograph night-scenes, emptied landscape scenes, liminal landscapes, where lights are shown glowing from the windows of prison cells, lamp posts and watch towers. The camera pans across the bluestone structures and roofs of the prison and there is a sense of menacing stillness and quiet and what happens inside those walls and under those roofs is left to the audience’s imagination. There are three scenes from this documentary that I would like to highlight which, together, create the building blocks of what has come to be the biographical cornerstone linking the "Kafir chiefs" to the Rivonia Trialists. The scenes work together in a manner that flattens and condenses the complexity of these two sets of prisoners in favour of a strident narrative and I argue that it is at the *limen* where the photograph is seen as a thing itself, with a biography of its own, that alternative histories are made possible.
Schadeberg I: Mirror, mirror on the wall

The first is footage from a 1938 Union of South Africa propaganda film production entitled “They Built a Nation” which sought to garner support from and galvanize English- and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans for the impending war effort. It traces the roots of this white nation to a benign European colonization of southern Africa and an aspect of the photographic features prominently in depictions of early colonial encounters.

This particular scene shows a “Hottentot’s” experience of seeing a reflection of himself in a mirror for the first time. The pantomimed scene emphasizes his attempt to find the reflected image of himself behind the mirror at the distance suggested by the reflected image. By selecting this clip, Schadeberg is referencing the accidental process of Othering that defines the colonial encounter. The reflection of the black self, in this instance, is facilitated by white man’s magic, colonial forms of representation and such-like. It is that liminal space behind the mirror that is the point.

Figure 6. Still from “Voices from Robben Island” depicting a colonial encounter with a reflection of self from the propaganda film “They Built a Nation” (In Schadeberg, 1994)
Schadeberg II: Photo-lineages and proto-lineages

The second clip is Schadeberg's depiction of the experiences of political imprisonment on Robben Island in the colonial period. He uses a number of filmic devices to narrate a version of that history by focusing on the well-documented incarceration of Maqoma et al following the wars of dispossession waged by the British on the Colony’s eastern frontier in the mid-19th Century. The link between the experiences of these prisoners and those of the Rivonia Trialists is made explicit. The image of the “chiefs” and their wives photographed on Murray’s Bay, Robben Island, in front of a tarp-covered reed hut and some dressed in skins, is Schadeberg’s entry-point.

He recreates the moment this photograph was captured by placing the German explorer and photographer Gustav Fritsch walking across the shale on Murray’s Bay in 1868 (he visited the Island in November 1863) and assembling his portable camera to photograph the now famous series of anthropometric portraits of the chiefs that became carte-de-visite as well as part of ethnographic collections in South Africa and Germany.

In “Voices”, the camera zooms in on the photograph of the "Kafir chiefs", as though they were standing in front of Fritsch. The sound of the shutter is signalled by the haunting display of the anthropometric portraits, with voice-overs provided by 20th Century political prisoners, narrating letters of appeal written by the chiefs to the Sovereign to return to their homes, renouncing armed resistance, and requesting to see their children. Schadeberg lays the first building-block for canonizing an unbroken similarity of political imprisonment experience.
The implication of this sequence is that the image of the chiefs photographed at Murray’s Bay was taken by Fritsch but it was in fact taken by Arthur Green or Frederick York or his assistants. Arthur Green bought York's studio in 1861 and may have acquired the photograph and negative through his purchase. Bull and Denfield (1970: 66) record that Frederick York's assistants, may have taken the photograph in question: "we find the Cape Mercantile Advertiser, October 8, 1859, stating that 'several excellent photographic views of the Robben Island Institution, and groups of the Kafir Chiefs now in exile there, have lately been taken for Mr. York, by his assistants Messrs. J. Lawley and J. Holloway'". This might well indicate that the photograph of the "Kafir Chiefs" was in fact taken by York's assistants and appears in the regular column of. "Miscellaneous Intelligence" in the Cape Mercantile Advertiser.

The photograph was first published in The Cape Monthly Magazine, Vol XI, January to June of 1862, in the format of the copy archived at the National Library of South Africa and bears the "A. Green, Pho." inscription, not on the photograph but in the frame in which the photograph was mounted in the magazine. This does not necessarily imply that Green took the photograph - he may well have been asserting ownership of the image as part of the studio, and its contents, that he purchased from York.

**Figure 7.** Still from “Voices from Robben Island” depicting a reconstruction of Gustav Fritsch photographing the “Xhosa chiefs” on Robben Island (Schadeberg, 1994)
There is a further reference in "Secure the Shadow" to a photograph for sale: "October 1859 - Stereoscopic views of Cape Town. Groups of the Kaffir Chiefs in exile on Robben Island" (Bull and Denfield, 1970: 220). The evidence suggests that the photograph has incorrectly been attributed to Gustav Fritsch and that historical detail changes the context in which the photograph was taken and how it entered circulation. It would appear that the only extant and original prints of this photograph are those that appeared in copies of the *Cape Monthly Magazine*.

In the edition of this magazine, the first framing of the photograph, it follows a piece welcoming the newly appointed governor to the Cape entitled: "His Excellency Governor Wodehouse". This article includes a photograph of the newly appointed Governor and has some sagely advice: "In the Cape of Good Hope, many opportunities will be offered him of showing himself a wise statesman, a sound financier, and a profound diplomat. The harvest truly is plenteous and in abundance there is to do". The article also lauds the efforts of the Crown's subjects at the Cape: "... strengthening the hands of the mother country and by consolidating the foundations upon which colonial commerce has been raised proved themselves apostles of the truest civilization, and exponents of the most single-mined patriotism" (*Cape Monthly Magazine*, XI, 1862: 128). The portrait of Governor Wodehouse is also attributed to A. Green.
Arthur Green was one of four Green brothers who made their way from Nova Scotia to the Cape in the mid-1800s and they occupied various positions in the colonial administrations in the Cape Colony and elsewhere in South Africa. Arthur Green’s illustrious but short-lived prominence as a photographer is richly chronicled in the Cape Archives as there are many records of his exploits as a failed photographic studio owner.

I have failed to locate an original copy of this photograph. So the original has now become the one published in *The Cape Monthly Magazine*, Volume XI of 1862. The life and times of Arthur Green, potential photographer of the “Kafir chiefs” photograph, and definitive owner of the photograph, has been partially documented in a research note on the family history of the Burmesters of Cape Town (Pelteret, 2013) and indicates that Green produced about 800 photographs that bar a few, have all but vanished from the record. Pelteret describes what Green did after his very short stint at trying to run York's studio:

**Figure 8.** Photograph and negative filed as “Kafir chiefs on Robben Island” at the National Library of South Africa (NLSA PHA 12054)
"For the next few months, it is related that Green spent his time as a free lance photographer. In November 1862, he opened a new portrait studio in Longmarket Street; and in 1863, Green made a photographic coup that was to immortalize him. On 10 August 1863 in Table Bay, he took portraits of the master and crew of the infamous confederate raider, CSS Alabama. The visit of Arthur Green is the only time photographs were taken on board the ship herself. Again he fell on hard times, was declared an unrehabilitated insolvent on 23 February 1864, and all his photographic material sold at a public sale on Saturday 9 April 1864. "800 Negative Pictures & Portraits, Views, &c., including (those of) the Alabama" were in contention, and are said to have been bought by another Cape Town photographer, F. Heldzinger. Green was destined never to establish an independent business again and worked for various individuals for the rest of his time in the Cape. Green left for overseas in 1866. He died in New York of pulmonary tuberculosis in 1873” (Pelteret, 2013).

Pelteret (2013: endnote 1), suggests that the following photograph (Figure 9) is a "double self-portrait" taken by Green on the Bokaap slope of Signal Hill overlooking the City Bowl and framed by Table Mountain:

“For a photographer of such note, this photograph is surprisingly poorly composed. Clearly, it is two prints joined seemingly to create a panoramic view. I suspect that Green is tricking his audience; that he has placed himself in both halves of the final photograph and that whilst in the one half the face is obscured (Green with helper), in the other the face is quite distinct (Green reclining). The Ego and the Alta Ego!”
The social biography of the “Kafir chiefs” photograph can no longer be ignored if it has been rolled into the biographical narrative representing the national liberation struggle as we shall see later in the current RIM mural at Murray's Bay.

**Schadeberg III: Rattling bones. Take Two**

The third clip from "Voices" is footage harvested from another propaganda piece - this time produced by the Apartheid government in 1978. The footage depicts a state funeral marking the return of Maqoma’s bones to his “old homeland” in the newly created Bantustan of the Ciskei. His coffin is draped in the newly created Ciskeian flag and his funerary procession from the frigate on to a carriage is imbued with military pomp staged generously by the then Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha. The appropriation of Maqoma’s legacy to bolster and authenticate the traditional leadership in the puppet-government of the Ciskei is one of many examples of heritage constructions that Maqoma, and especially photographic images of him, has been able to animate.
Fritsch’s anthropometric portrait of Maqoma appears on the cover on what has become the “go-to” treatise for the history of Robben Island. The recontextualization and re-framing of the portrait of Maqoma, taken by Gustav Fritsch, and part of a series of anthropometric photographic studies of prisoners of war on Robben Island in the 1860s, has come to be the iconic link that sutures together the originary myths of the modern liberation struggle in South Africa.

Hayes and Bank (2001) critically examine how this image has been used in what has come to be regarded as one of the authoritative texts on Robben Island’s history edited by Deacon (1996). They frame their inquiry as a ‘social biography of the photograph” and argue that “(t)here is an irony, however, in casting the Xhosa chief as an icon of African resistance through the use, firstly of a British war artist’s ideologically invested imagery as a backdrop and secondly, of a portrait photograph of an already incarcerated resister. The irony is compounded when we consider …the ideological context within which the photograph itself was produced” (Hayes and Bank, 2001: 1-2). The image “fits within a visual field of portraits

Figure 10. Still from “Voices from Robben Island” depicting propaganda footage of Maqoma’s state funeral and his remains returning to the Bantustan of the Ciskei (Schadeberg, 1994)
of resisters in later chapters to the Island’s most famous political prisoners – the Rivonia Trialists”.

“Any reuse of a photograph is, of course, bound to involve a recontextualization. Photographs can never be fully reinserted into their ‘original’ histories, however much explanatory context or nuance we provide. There will always be a gap, an absence, a dislocation between a photograph’s past and present reconstructions of that past. This does not absolve us, however, from the task of probing and historicising the complex and diverse ways in which photographs are coded and then recoded’ (Hayes and Bank, 2001: 3). Bank’s (2001) essay in Kronos suggests that there are alternative ways of framing the Fritsch photographs and his essay on Fritsch's Robben Island anthropometric portraits confirms this (Bank, 2008).

Odendaal (2012 and 2003) also attributes the “Kafir chiefs” image to Fritsch. In the 2003 book, on the history of cricket in South Africa, Odendaal's photographic credits attribute the photograph to: "23. Robert Fritsch /National Library of South Africa". In his interpretation, the cobbling of a genealogical link starts to emerge between the “Kafir chiefs” and a black Victorian legacy and he presents the photographs with captions in the following manner.

**Figure 12.** In Odendaal (2012) the image is captioned:
“Below: Some of their sons were sent to Zonnebloem College in Cape Town, where they were photographed in 1863. (Cape Archives).”

![Image](image-url)

**Figure 13.** In Odendaal (2012) the image is cropped and does not have “A.Green, Pho.” in the bottom left hand corner and is captioned:
“Changing worlds. Above: Xhosa chiefs imprisoned on Robben Island in the late 1850s and 1860s, photographed by Gustav Fritsch. (NLSA PHA)”.

In the 2003 book, Odendaal's caption reads: "While the Xhosa Chiefs were imprisoned The photograph also appears in a detailed historical study of Zonnebloem College by Hodgson (1975:) and is captioned: "13. Basuto students at Zonnebloem. 1876. (Zonnebloem Papers)". Maqoma's son, started at Zonnebloem but was then sent to Canterbury in England for schooling.
on Robben Island in the 1860s, some of their sons were being given a British education and learning to play cricket across the Bay."

There are other photographs of Maqoma and his wife, in less dressy Western dress, filed at the National Library of South Africa in an album compiled from other albums and titled: "African Prisoners Album 191"(NLSA: INIL 24159, 24161). The following photograph of Maqoma and his wife (Figure 14), attributed to William Moore, shows Maqoma and his wife as black Victorians themselves. The Victorian photographs of the chiefs do not make for an easy chronological narrative and has been ignored in South Africa but has appeared in several exhibitions sourced from the Walther Collection (see caption to Figure 14).

A recently published doctoral thesis explores the heritage of the black Victorian legacy in South African history:

“This dissertation excavates the print and archive culture of diasporic and continental Africans who forged a community in Cape Town between 1900 and 1946. Although the writers I consider write after the Victorian era, I use the term “black Victorian” to preserve their own political investments in a late nineteenth-century understanding of liberal empire. With the abolition of slavery in 1834 across the British Empire and the Cape Colony’s qualified non-racial franchise of 1853, Cape Town, and District Six in particular, took on new significance in black radicalism. By writing periodicals, pamphlets and autobiographies, black Victorians hoped to write themselves into the culture of empire” (Collis, 2013: Abstract).
Landau (2010: 147) suggests that there is a stark difference between ethnographic and studio portraiture: "...in ethnographic photographs the camera was often positioned as if for comparative identification, too far away for a personal greeting, but too close for hailing the subject: an impossible or ordinarily transient distance ... wealthier patrons of the emerging 'photographic saloons' in urban South Africa, of whatever race, represented themselves with bourgeois props, as persons bravely facing the world. But ethnographic photographs worked by representing persons as metonyms for a larger entity, a tribe or racial type." As Landau

**Figure 14.** Portrait of Maqoma and his wife as black Victorians. The caption reads:


Along with several other Xhosa leaders and their wives, Maqoma was imprisoned on Robben Island for leading insurgencies during the Frontier Wars of the eighteen-fifties. This widely circulated portrait was taken after their release. Even when they were photographed on Robben Island, Maqoma and his wife never sat for the camera without dress coats, hats, and shawls” (Wender, 2013).
(2010: 149) describes it: "the dream of becoming a citizen of the British Empire seemed within reach" and it is these aspirations that make Victorian depictions of black Africans complex and fractured. It is easier to describe, chronologically, the genesis of resistance to colonial oppression as uprisings of "Raw Kaffirs" in skins, than a gentrified elite (banished or being mission educated at industrial schools) consciously being co-opted and groomed by colonial government.

In his biographical engagement with studio photographs of Victorian and early 20th Century black middle-class subjects, Mofokeng asserts: "(t)heir significance lies outside the framed image. They were made in a period when the power of the South African state was being entrenched and policies towards people the government designated as 'natives' were being articulated. It was an era mesmerized by the newly discovered social sciences (1996: 70). In selecting the photographs for "The Black Photo Album", Mofokeng declares that it was "conceived as a metaphorical biography" but later concedes that "(t)hese photographs explore a part of my being which up until now I had neglected - my spirituality, I mean"(1996: 72). Mofokeng deploys the instrumentality of personal experience, of autobiographical projection to access memory and, what Mofokeng refers to as, "heavy memories"; where "shallow" memory references personal experience and "heavy" ones signify collective or social memories. To be truly inside, suggests Mofokeng, requires an imputation of soul or what he calls: "seriti".

A similar sentiment is raised by Wylie in her "Introduction" to a special issue of *Kronos* on documentary photography (2012: 19):

"Since photographs are loaded with an ‘excess of meaning’, the historian has an important role to play: in effect, he writes extended captions that help to ground them in past reality. How should he ideally approach this task? With humility? Why should he bother? Because photographs have a peculiar power to break through received wisdom and allow our imaginations to enter into a sympathetic relationship with people and situations beyond our experience."
Orality and Visuality

Representation, be it visual or in oral testimony, of complex narratives always involves decisions about what to include and what to exclude. Minkley (2008) argues that “living heritage” has been worked by the “heritage complex” into the production of a master, national narrative. This narrative presents a developmental sequence of an African journey from a deep, customary, intangible and rural pre-/colonial past to a modern, urban, tangible post-colonial one and is indicative of the dominant ideology thesis (Turnbridge and Ashworth, 1996). Minkley’s contention is that the master narrative of post-colonial liberation is a Victorian Romantic one – a narrative in the idiom of Romance – and it is through typification of biographical heroes that intangible heritage enters lists and registers. This documentation signals a codification in much the same way that African languages achieved official status: “In effect, then, the documentary heritage list enables a transfer of the romantic anti-colonial/anti-apartheid form into writing, an understanding of this document – as the carrier of information – before this can be ascertained as factual and then effectively made fact in heritage registers, inventories and data-bases” (2008: 30).

Minkley argues that the collapsing of oral historiography into oral tradition or orality by the “memorial complex” in South Africa needs to reflect on its own genealogy: “We argue that this complex needs to be subject to – from the side of public history – a critical exploration and engagement of its genealogy, changes, developments and forms of constituting the modern power/knowledge complex of the post-apartheid ‘national estate” (2008: 17). The “conjoining”, and conflation, of “indigenous tradition” and “popular resistance” conceals a deep disjuncture between notions of an authentic, rural African tradition and the anti-colonial quest for participation in a realist modernity which, argues Minkley, is a modernity “rooted in the epistemological and linguistic apparatus” (2008: 32).

The cautionary that applies to oral history and orality, is equally valid for visual history. As elements of the historical record, photographs have the uncanny ability, with the slightest shifts in re-framing, to mean whatever one wants them to. It is the plasticity of interpretation that makes them so amenable to use in constructing heritage narratives and as bearers of implied authenticity, can, like voices, speak on behalf of the record.
MURALS AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IN ROBBEN ISLAND MUSEUM NARRATIVES

In this section I look at how the photographic is used in one of the key exhibition strategies at Robben Island Museum. The immediacy and visceral nature of wall-sized images evokes intensely emotional engagements with the spaces that murals lay claim to and paradoxically open up. The mural has a long history in many liberation struggles across the globe and is particularly prevalent in situations where visibility is a highly contested space; as in Northern Ireland, Latin America, Israel-Palestine and South Africa.

The writing's on the wall

Figure 15. “Mural Exhibit”. Nelson Mandela Gateway. (Photograph by the author: 2014).
The Mural Exhibit at the Nelson Mandela Gateway is a contemporary video installation where a life-size choir ensemble comprised of political prisoners and support group members from all over South Africa is projected as a mural onto a long wall in a very dark and intimate space. In the image above (Figure 15) I explore movement to ironically mimic the instability of the photographic in economies of representation. I particularly liked the idea of linking the two figures closest to the camera, the seated woman and the man, to the portrait of Maqoma and his wife – see Figure 14. Their countenance is similar despite the inverted seating arrangement. The original conforms to Victorian and local customs of patriarchal deference while the video image reverses this. Organisational formations in liberation struggles are often referred to as "the movement" and the concept is also used to describe a genre or set of aesthetic practices in art history. The antithesis of movement or motion or invisibility, is captured visibility.

Feldman’s remarkable analysis of scopophobic visibility or the violence of visibility and violations of space in situations of “totalized optic surveillance”, endemic to everyday life in Northern Ireland, could be seen as one of many aspects of the “perceptual infrastructure of acts of domination and violence” (1997: 30). For Feldman, it is not the authorial eye, but visual realism in symbiosis with the male gaze that obfuscates and splits the eye from the gaze and so lays claim to, and establishes, “realist, transparent and natural truth” (1997: 45). Visual realism, as the motor of surveillance culture, saturates and creates new subjectivities, self-representations and engagements all pregnant with imminent totalitarian and resistance violence.

“Visual realism”, suggests Feldman (1997: 32), “is created by defacing the agency of the eye and through the cultivation of a certain type of nonbeing, for one of the artefacts created by realist representation is the very normative and passive eye that receives the image – seeing supposedly does not exist outside the realist frame or so we are conditioned to assume”. Central to Feldman’s argument that visual realism is not a “passive reflection or mimesis’ is the concept of “homoiosis” - which he argues realist aesthetics are based on. Homoiosis helps us to understand how the “resembling gaze matches perception to what should be sighted” (1997: 41-44).
Leaning on Lacan’s analysis of the correlation between “visual objectification, vertigo, and the “drive to spatial domination”, Feldman suggests that this “implicitly connects scopic regimes with the spatialized politics of nationalism and related projects of topographic control” (1997: 46-47). For Feldman (1997: 55), “the dominance of visual paradigms in the prosecution of political warfare and in its culture of representation and … in their very telling … register the limits of vision and violence as vehicles for claiming the truth”. Feldman explores how the dominant way of seeing and forms of resistance are structured by, and most importantly, structures, the hegemonic visual culture in a scopic regime: “(t)he circuit formed by vision and violence is itself circumscribed by zones of blindness and inattention” (1997: 29).

The metaphorical separation of the authorial eye from the gaze is literally the case in the centre-piece photograph around which Feldman’s “anthropology of the senses” is based – in it we ‘see’ a blind survivor of ongoing violence in Ireland who is ‘posed’ with a portrait he took using an automatic camera as a prosthetic eye. This represents, for Feldman, a product of violence and the violence of being seen in a scopic regime in which power and violence is once-removed from the authorial eye and instead imbues all aspects of lived reality. It is in the viewing and in the invisible that the pregnant violence implicit in totalitarian surveillance is enacted. It has encouraged a very visual culture to develop in which violent imaginings are visual imaginings that extend to imaginings of altars of national entities on which lives are lived and sacrificed.

Cultural representations of the self in ethnicized and politicized landscapes are constituted in subjectivities that rely on differentiators based on creed, accents, style and comportment, sectarian resistance politics and the narratives of ‘telling’ - all of which are in a discursive relationship with the master narrative: the nexus of visual realism and the male gaze. Feldman suggests that cultures of resistance and domination share an unproblematized vernacular steeped in visual violence and that this constitutes the buried and embedded unconscious of Northern Ireland.

It is incumbent that we problematize this shared vernacular of visual expression, ethnicized identities and even the genre in which narratives are cast in order to better understand our role in representing heritage by using images from the past.
The Murray's Bay mural

The second mural exhibit I would like to look at is installed on the jetty at the Murray’s Bay harbour on Robben Island. Mnyaka’s summary of Hayes’ modalities which she develops in order to make sense of distinctive periods in the development of photography in South Africa provides a useful angle to start looking at the manner in which photographs are used in this mural:

“Hayes divides her account along three modalities: power, secrecy and proximity. Under the first modality which covers the period roughly from the end of the nineteenth century to late 1940s, the account makes mention of a myriad of photographic practices, from daguerreotypists, to ethnographic practices, prison photography, salons and pictorialism. These she relates in varying degrees to the processes of colonisation, knowledge production and captivity. In the second phase she focuses on the cohort of documentary photographers from the 1950 to the 1980 that exposed the effects of apartheid including explicitly anti-apartheid photographers. She notes the concealment of such practices in the period of state repression. Lastly, she draws attention to post-apartheid photographic practice, noting the professionalization of former struggle photographers, the complexity of social distance existing between the photographers and photographed, issues around photographing ‘one’s community’ and the emergence of woman-centred photography with a feminist agenda” (Mnyaka, 2012: 2-3).

Presented as a definitive narrative of the heritage of political imprisonment on Robben Island, the mural seamlessly stitches together a chronological sequence that is read from left to right. We enter this storyline through what can be read as the first photograph of political imprisonment on Robben Island of the type that Hayes (Mnyaka, 2012: 2) describes as the power modality of the photographic. From this colonial or ethnographic gaze, the story of the struggle against Apartheid unfolds using documentary or struggle photography, again using Hayes’ typology. These Apartheid era photographs were largely sourced from Oryx Media, a visual production company involved as contractors in many of the exhibits at Robben Island Museum, and the Mayibuye Collection.
This section forms a triptych composed of three panels: Repression, Resistance and Resurrection. The first two use images in the documentary modality while the final image is representative of the aesthetic modality— in this instance, a post-apartheid Photoshopped pastiche of democratic South Africa’s first three presidents. The sequence ends with an aesthetically enhanced version of the Robben Island Museum logo (see Figure 20).

The liminal nature of photographs alluded to by Naude (2014) in her exhibition questioning representation and photography, has led me to explore how it is used in the biographical narrative on Robben Island and try to understand the spatio-temporal moment of the images’ creation. Who took the photograph of the chiefs that is used in the mural at Murray's Bay?

**Figure 16.** View of the mural exhibit from the ferry’s approach to Murray’s Bay harbour on Robben Island. (Photograph by the author: 2014).

**Figure 17.** The story of the political prisoner experience represented in the Murray’s Bay mural as the narrative of national liberation in South Africa. (Print-ready PDF files of individual panels simulates the billboard mural welcoming visitors to Robben Island Museum, courtesy of RIM).
This is a fundamental question if we are to understand it. The suspended anonymity of most photographs used in the Robben Island Museum narrative asserts a curatorial authority that places at risk one of the museum’s primary roles – as an institution of learning and social space where dialogue is facilitated.

In her discussion about the role of the museum in post-Apartheid South Africa, Coombes (2003: 207) argues that:

"A related dilemma that surfaces in the South African debates is what the ideal role of the museum should be: to educate for transition and for a new model of national unity or be a venue that eschews a conciliatory role in favour of exploring the contradictions and tensions of a more dynamic model of history and society. In other words, how much should shared histories and common goals be foregrounded rather than emphasizing the ethnic, cultural, and political particularities of different sectors of society and the tensions among them ... (t)he concept of the 'rainbow nation', promoted under Mandela's government of national unity, was designed to mediate such a legacy and to foster national solidarity while accommodating ethnic diversity. Dubbed by some as the 'Benetton effect' the strategy was subject to similar charges of wilful exclusion and naive idealism and was not without contradictions".
THE CIVIL CONTRACT, MOVEMENT, NARRATIVE, MEMORY

The liminal state, encountered at the photograph's limen, represents an exciting possibility to explore identity formation that may well yield a revitalized conception of how photographs work. It is toward the universality of the photographic that the next section is addressed and focuses on the work of Azoulay whose philosophical photographic discourse arose out of an analysis of the photographic in the nakbah, or catastrophe, of the Palestinian liberation struggle. It seeks out a new internationalism based on the universality of the photographic and plugs into a discourse that centres "trauma" as a key aspect of experiences of the liminal inducted by the viewing of photographs.

In “The civil contract of photography”, Azoulay(2008) chases the elusive, almost global shadow that photography casts on the modern polity and concludes that the constellation of identities evoked in photographic interactions is mimetic of identity formation in the modern state: “developing the characteristics of this contract is my way of questioning photography’s political configuration and reflecting on its effect on the modern form of sovereignty and its territorial articulation”(2008: 87).
This, “civil contract”, for Azoulay, arises when photography is invented and the authority to control the invention is lost to the inventor because the camera initiated a “space of plurality” in which the photographer, the photographed and the spectator negotiate the meaning of images.

The assumed violation of self, evidenced in the exploitation or violation of the photographed subject, is facilitated through what Azoulay describes as a “tacit agreement” (2008: 107) in which the rights to one’s own image is surrendered in the photographic encounter and structures an essentially “assymetrical relation”. The civil contract of photography is the price paid in creating new subjectivities and new political spaces, argues Azoulay, and it is a democratic one in the sense that it makes generally accessible, a new contemplative gaze “based on a new attitude to the visual” (2008: 96), an “economy of gazes”. This new ‘state’, peopled by the “citizenry of photography” (Azoulay, 2008: 97), and enabling the “civil gaze”, argues Azoulay, “doesn’t seek to control the visible, but neither can it bear another’s control of the visible. In particular, it cannot consent to any attempt to rule the visible while seeking to abolish the space of plurality” (2008: 97).
Azoulay concludes that “(i)n order to create this economy of gazes, each and every one had to renounce his or her right to preserve his or her own, autonomous visual field from external forces, but also acquires an obligation to defend the gaze in order to make it available for others to enter and intermingle” (2008: 113). Photography, then, is viewed by Azoulay as “an essential vector of change in perceptual matrix” and “(t)he capacity to look can no longer be seen as a personal property” (2008: 113).

Humanity, Azoulay would lead us to believe, has been turned into the object of photography and “whoever seeks to use photography must exploit the photographed individual’s vulnerability” and therein lies photography’s impasse, or as Azoulay would have it, it’s “paradox”. The flawed nature of the photographed person’s citizenship entails a consent that renounces a right in order to create a civil gaze which is conditional on the consent of all others.

Figure 19. Photograph of the "Kafir chiefs" image as it appears in the Cape Monthly Magazine in 1862. (Image received from the website selling a copy of this Volume viewed at http://www.maggs.com/departments/travel/authors/capetown/the-cape-monthly-magazine/tr34853 and accessed on 26/5/2014).
An alternative reading of the civil contract as described by Azoulay, renders what could be construed as complicit silence. We have assimilated photography and voices like Azoulay’s impel us to reconsider how the ubiquity of the image resonates and articulates in modernity, how photography is used as totalitarian instrument and how it is used in liberation, how multiplicity of meanings coagulates in photographic encounters and how seeing is manufactured. It is an argument for universal agency and stateless politics based in asymmetry and difference.

Thomas (2012) concludes her analysis of the images of Apartheid violence photographed by Gille de Vlieg as follows: “critical engagement with the affective force of photographs pushes us to engage with the politics of the present. In their stillness photographs do not transport us as films do. Instead their demand is for us to think and be moved, both affectively and in the sense of being moved to action”. It is the politics of the present that foregrounds the need to critically look at the reframing of historical photographs such as the one used to introduce the heritage narrative of political imprisonment on Robben Island.

**Arriving at the threshold**

Following Dados' (2010) explorations of liminality and photographs, the threshold has two interpretations. First is the photograph as a two dimensional plane, a picture, and how that image is framed is one interpretation. The other is the process facilitated by the photographic image as a portal. Within and at its surface lies a negative or in the case of a digital photograph, its source code and meta data: "conceiving of the photograph as a point of flux between two separate events, the capture of the image and its viewing, suggests that any link between the two events resides solely in the limits of photography, at the surface of the photograph"(Dados, 2010).
In the RIM exhibition vernacular, it is the format of the mural that this paper has examined as the plane in which the "Kafir chiefs" is presented. It is billboard-sized. Monumental. An interpretation of the threshold is as a portal which presents two-way traffic: the image allows us to enter history and it allows history to seep into the present. We enter the threshold by experiencing a frozen moment in time and simultaneously, we let that experience into the present. In the RIM exhibit of the "Kafir chiefs" under discussion in this paper, the image allows us to enter the RIM heritage narrative by referencing the deep history of political imprisonment on Robben Island but it also allows us to access the photographic complex that describes the moment the photograph was taken and its circulation in private ownership, publications and collections. What was happening in the wider photographic economy of the time: Who was taking the photograph? With what equipment? To what end? Who was being photographed and how were they being photographed?

Figure 20. The last panel in the Murray’s Bay mural with an extended version of the Robben Island Museum logo. (Photographed by the author: 2014)
So we are deep in the history of the development of photography at the Cape Colony in the year 1859. Arthur Green and Frederick York were both photographic pioneers of their time moving in and out of an emerging profession, and so was Gustav Fritsch. They introduced many innovations to Cape photography: not least of which included the quarter and 3/4 portrait, the double portrait, the mobile studio, and most importantly, the carte-de-visite.

Excised from its biography, the photograph of the "Kafir chiefs" condenses, flattens and excludes the photograph's creation. In its new frame, it stands for indigineity, tradition, and the deeply biographical heritage of 20th Century national liberation leaders.

Dados' schema of the liminal threshold of the photograph, "where stillness becomes movement, moment becomes narrative, and artefact becomes memory", allows us to access the rich contemporary and colonial history of an image that has been mis-interpreted and inaccurately attributed and holds within it, a powerful key to unlocking the heritage narrative it introduces. The importance of the social biography of this photograph becomes clearer if we are to read the photograph in the heritage of national liberation which the RIM narrative alludes to.

**Figure 21.** The first panel of the mural on Murray's Bay jetty. From a print-ready PDF file, courtesy of RIM. The logo of the Department of Arts & Culture appears below the World Heritage Site logo on the installed exhibit.
In his discussion about the politics of aesthetics, Sey (2011: 10) argues that the "liminal" is of particular significance to contemporary South African visual art: "South African visual art, especially in its contemporary guise, might be fruitfully reappraised as a unique treasure trove of the liminal. The liminal can be seen as a penetrating means to understand South African art because of its inherent demonstration of the mobility and fluidity of otherness, of the deflation of the notion that an inherent barrier exists between the experiencing self and the close but distant other, between the mad and the sane, or the imperial subject and its colonised object".

I would take that one step further and suggest that pausing at the limen, at the very threshold through which the liminal is accessed, betrays the emerging master narrative of the South African Rainbow Nation. The taming of the irreverence of Maqoma, in a biographical chronology narrating the emerging South African nation, excludes the Victorian genre in

**Figure 22.** Ladders lead up and down, in and out. Thresholds in a watch tower at Robben Island Maximum Security Prison

(Photographed by the author: 2014)
which this narrative is cast and further cloaks the Christian allegory implicit in the narrative as it appears in the RIM mural currently installed at Murray's Bay jetty.

Considered use of space in curating heritage narratives necessitates an engagement with the politics of aesthetics. One of Wylie’s (2012: 19, 21) concluding remarks on the reframing of historical photographs is apt: “(e)mprirical historians can only hope that badly needed correctives to colonial arrogance do not lead to an open field for highly subjective interpretation. The profession is unlikely to tolerate anyone saying, like Lewis Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty, that when he uses a picture, it means only and precisely what he chooses it to mean ... (w)e need each other: photographers need historians to write captions that help to unlock meanings in pictures, historians need photographers because they offer a precious and humane link to our ancestors on either side of the lens."

Naude's exhibition "Away from view" indicates themes in the fragmented genesis of photography where artefactual realism and spectral possibility both result from representations of very particular points of view facilitated by the camera obscura. This exhibition highlights the transformation of Robben Island Museum's exclusive focus on the triumph over repression to representations of a more comprehensive history of the Island. Schadeberg's "Voices" is one of the first cohesive attempts to create a heritage lineage of the experience of 19th Century political incarceration on Robben Island and the Rivonia Trialists. The key role that the reframing of historical photographs plays in how Schadeberg succeeds in presenting this, has been incorporated into the Robben Island Museum vernacular. Photographs are stitched together in a heritage narrative that has more to do with a master narrative of national liberation and nation-building than with the many layers of heritage inhabiting the Island. There is a threat that assumed authenticity and un-authored truths presented in RIM heritage narratives have become the norm in this vernacular. This paper tentatively pauses at the limen of the photograph to find the many frames that the photographs invoke. The multiplicity of meanings that photographs carry, its heaviness of "excess meaning", is something that requires humility and respect. Both Azoulay and Dados reflect on the universality of photography and suggest that the photographic is embedded in modernity. It is a defining shaper and feature of modernity. Hence, its powerful ability to demonstrate contestations of visibility. It has the potential to make the marginalized, central. It also could shift the metropolitan to the peripheral and it is this universality, our shared
citizenship of the photographic that could be addressed by a set of protocols when we work with photographs. The most important of which is an awareness of the actants in the photographic and that photographs become things in themselves, with social biographies involving real lives - the photographer, the photographed, the viewer.

Figure 23. A depiction of Maqoma's victory at Waterkloof in 1851. (Provenance to be researched - possibly by Baines. It has been suggested that it was the snipers (the literature indicates these as "Khoi" descendants or "Coloureds" who won the day.

Captioned in the ebook as follows:
CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I have attempted to illustrate how, through examining a single photograph that introduces the Robben Island Museum narrative on the Murray's Bay Jetty, how the biography of the political prisoner - particularly the biography of Nelson Mandela - has come to represent the biography of the South African nation. Accessing the circumstances of this image's creation through the archival record and historical research, indicates a dysjunct between the events leading to the development of this image and its re-purposing in the darkroom of the South African "memorial complex". The reconfiguration of this photograph did not happen overnight and instead involved several iterations in the development and production of new meanings accorded to the image by writers, historians and ultimately the Robben Island Museum. It is to the "institutional gaze" and its role in relation to history, heritage and the museum that I address my attention to in this chapter with the intention of exploring why pausing at the threshold of photographs is relevant to the development of critical heritage practice. This chapter seeks to frame notions of nation, heritage, history and museum as cultural artefacts.

In Chapter 1 I explored the convergence of two understandings of the concept of liminality, as spatial or aesthetic and an anthropological event, and suggest that liminality can be used to describe how a key characteristic of how photographs work. I suggested that photographs themselves are key operators of liminality. I looked at how photographs work across the Robben Island Museum precinct and paid special attention to how photographs of Maqoma have been used to develop a master narrative of national-building at Robben Island Museum.

The second question tries to locate why understanding 'how photographs work' is important to the development of progressive museum practice and a critical heritage discourse that leans into difference and re-thinks institutional "intangible heritage". By intangible heritage, in this instance, I am referring to the intangible heritage of the museum by which I mean the ideological practices that have shaped the emergence of the museum as an essential component of the exhibitionary complex in coloniality and modernity - how taxonomies, collection and display strategies, as well as approaches to memory and archive have shaped
the historical role of museums in nation-building, identity politics and the making of publics in the modern nation state. Photography and the modern museum developed simultaneously to become key operators of a visual economy in which personhood is imaged. The relationship between heritage and history, and the imagining of future polities, in the context of globalized pressure on museums to become destinations that package and commodify heritage products begs a reconsideration: away from a "bricks-and-mortar" conception of the museum and toward a view of the institution as a spatio-temporal artefact that like all cultural artefacts, is dynamic and fluid and has more to do with the process of knowledge production, social relations and constellations of power and authority and thus demands democratization.

The third question is how do we begin a drift away from the institutional gaze so tightly associated with the modern museum. How do we begin to curate difficult knowledge? If we embrace museums as sites of knowledge production and therefore, its ideological workings, then the how, why, where, when questions of what museums do demands an interrogation of museums as sites of struggle, as spaces of contestation, as thinking spaces. And this presses us to think deeply about the role of curatorial decisions, directions and authority in producing heritage narratives. In the context of South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, identifying what the dominant narrative is and how to develop it further through contestation and experimental methodologies and practices, is the challenge. In South Africa today, the dominant narrative is dominated by the mythology of multi-culturalism, reconciliation and the idea of the "Rainbow nation" - the celebration of the end of Apartheid. For many, this is an unresolved and premature celebration that does not redress the violence of our past and obfuscates our present. How can we curate difficult knowledge? I attempt to frame this discussion in the wider context of critical heritage discourse and the contestation of meanings and knowledge production, as well as issues in the transformation of the museum and a discussion on curatorial authority in the visual economy of the museum.

ON PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT

The first panel of the on Murray's Bay jetty mural, is a photograph of the so called "Kafir chiefs", now referred to as the "Xhosa Chiefs", who were imprisoned on the Island in the 19th Century and through this photograph we access the deep history of political incarceration on the Island. Both these terms are in the vernacular of colonial, tribal and un-problematicized
ethnic nomenclature and its continued use in post-apartheid South Africa belies a greater problem of identity politics. The stickiness of these ethnic categories are part of the reason why a critique of the rainbow nation is required. The biographical narrative represented in the rest of the welcoming panels makes the link between these early political prisoners and the Rivonia Trialists explicit and casts this biographical narrative as the national narrative of the liberation struggle against Apartheid. I pause at this very first photograph because of how it has been activated in the RIM narrative gives us many clues about the relationship between representations of the past, history and heritage in nation-building and the role of the museum in creating ideas of personhood.

**WHY ARE PHOTOGRAPHS IMPORTANT TO CRITICAL HERITAGE PRACTICE?**

In a review of Marilena Alivizatou’s Intangible Heritage and the Museum, New Perspectives on Cultural Preservation, Fromme (2013: 194) suggests that Alivizatou’s analysis is “derived from the growing point of view that museums are archives of culture as well as emergent social spaces”. Fromme looks at the genealogy of specific museums and uses in-depth interviews with heritage practitioners in order to situate how some of these museums have “adopted the perspective of empowering communities by reviving, revitalizing and supporting the continuity of traditional knowledge or intangible heritage” while others still consider intangible heritage as part of non-European traditions. Alivizatou views all museums as a “charged political space” (Fromme, 2013: 195) and suggests that all collections in all museums are cultural collections and that this intangible practice, this heritage practice, is the key to understanding how the UNESCO-led initiative to promote ‘intangible heritage’ is engaged by specific institutions. Without questioning the heritage of the museum itself, or understanding the political spaces that museums create, intangible heritage will remain an unreflexive discourse that attempts to appropriate local cultural practices into the heritage complex, at best, and at worst, confirms and asserts forms of identity formation that are colonial-modern and exacerbates ethnically infused difference.

In his paper on "Memory and Representation: Robben Island: 1997 - 1999", Noel Solani (2002: 20-21) alerts us to the critical role of authorship, of curatorial authority, in heritage narratives: "These memories, like history, are mostly mediated by the curator/author while
the visitor also has some responsibility in which they interact with the exhibition. The curators are often invisible to the museum audience. The invisibility of the author presents the exhibition to the audience as a real unmediated past. When that happens museums provide formal and official versions of the past called histories, offered through exhibitions or the individual or the collective accounts of reflective personal experiences called memories encountered during the visit or prompted because of it.

Museums, like photography, represent a key element in the visual economy of modernity and have played a significant role in how ideas of society are represented. Museums are almost synonymous with the exhibitionary complex of modernity. Museums and photography functioned as prisms and callipers, as instruments through which Darwinian evolutionism was displayed. Through the conquered black bodies were viewed. Both emerged at a time when the study of natives was constituting itself as a new academic discipline, anthropology, and history was constituting itself as the discipline concerned with the civilized world, those with history. Photography played an important role in mediating the consumption of otherness, of difference, in the museum and has played an essential role in shaping identities in the colonial and post-colonial, the colonized and the colonizing and those seeking liberation from the prisons of miscast identity.

The emergence of claims of proprietary heritage, which I loosely define as the notion that museums and their collections and practices as well as heritage, can be possessed through proprietary claims by a group, as belonging to that group, is the greatest challenge facing the emergence of progressive museum practice. The solution I believe lies in the development of critical curatorial practice which can only be achieved by questioning curatorial authority and interrogating the role of the institutional gaze in order to create museums that aspire to develop a radical, critical citizenry.

Museums need to contextualize their histories in order to develop strategies to emerge as relevant institutions. They need to become self-reflexive. As institutions, museums emerged as a component of cultural changes brought on by colonialism and modernity. Their historical function was transformatory - to create citizens of nascent modern polities emerging from feudal, monarchical orders. Museums emerged as part of the scopic regime of modernity where citizens were seen and could be seen to be participating in civil society.
Creating publics, through mechanisms of commodified displays of material culture, became the core function of the exhibitionary complex at the heart of museum collecting strategies. The taxonomies employed in displaying these collections have played a critical role in shaping the identities of museum audiences. Museums, across the board, need to first and foremost, identify and develop audiences through their display of things.

For a long time, it is the display of “things” that has been regarded as the core of what museums do. Increasingly, an understanding of the social lives of things, and how meaning is produced by things, is shifting the focus from things themselves to what the display of things does and how they are integral to shaping museum narratives. Forms of display of things references the ideological function of museums. The agency of things presents museums with opportunities to explore complexity and multiplicity of meaning. By extension, it is the agency of the museum, and its practitioners, as it reconstitutes the meanings of things - as objects are collected and incorporated and processed inside the museum complex - that introduces reflexivity into museum practice. Rather than collections of objects, museums are better thought of as an assemblage of negotiated social relations. They are peopled by administrators, maintenance and service staff, managers, accountants, curators, printers and contractors and artists and performers and musicians, and critically, by their audiences - their publics.

Approaches to 'culture' and 'community' as process rather than as 'thing' facilitates the shift away from the fetishization of objects and restores people to the heart of museum discourse. It is the understanding of things, then, that is the challenge. If museums are more to do about the production of meaning, or knowledge, and less to do with things, then an approach to museums emerges that is relational: how people relates to things, and how people relate to people. This roughly triangulates as a mediation between museum practitioner, collection/process, and community.

Systematic collections of things indicate the relationship between power and knowledge. Collecting methodologies and strategies, classificatory systems and genres of display are intimately linked to the genesis of the modern museum in the age of imperialism, industrial and colonial expansion. The colonial politics of collecting and the formation of the museum as a public institution relying on an exhibitionary format, where publics are made, needs to be
reflected in how we develop progressive approaches to the future of the museum. The colonial legacy of the museum is in jeopardy but at the same time, has proved to be resilient especially in post-colonial ecologies where museums have been used in support of invoking and constructing nationalisms and ethnic identities.

The concept of intangible heritage comes into its own when ascribed to the practices of museums themselves. The "intangible heritage" of the museum, as trope for modernity, is the legacy that museums need to grapple with in order to reconfigure themselves. The intangible heritage of the museum is its disciplining role in marshalling material culture along taxonomies derived from academic discourses of the time.

The deafening silence of objects, of row upon row of representative stuff, of collections, cannot continue unabated. De-accessioning illicitly collected materials, for example, is the first step in re-activating these collections as artefacts in themselves. The nuances and meanings of things requires intervention. They require mediation. Activating and worrying the archive and assembling new archives is an important factor in revitalizing the idea of the museum. It is not the bricks-and-mortar of the museum that is at stake, but its ideological practice. The spatiality of the museum, how it is configured inside buildings and how it sits in a landscape (a street in a city block in a province in a country or on a converted barn on farm etc.) should not be neglected in reconstituting community inside and around the museum.

As institutions, museums can be thought of as venerated cultural artefacts that showcase through exhibition, taxonomic authority and the performance of curatorial power. Foucauldian analyses of schema of visibility have been used to describe how museums function in the wider scopic regime and the disciplining effect of what is seen, and what is hidden. The critique of the museum as public institution, is a critique based on an understanding of the museum's function in the ordering and display of objects and knowledges, but also on its role in the ordering of people and society. It is both disciplining and pedagogic. The challenge is to facilitate a dialogue. Of creating new community, and new audiences.
MUSEUMS AND NARRATING NATIONS

Robben Island Museum was established as the first national museum in post-apartheid South Africa. It was founded as the site where the new history of the emerging democratic nation would be inscribed. Central to this "new" history is the idea of the 'triumph of the human spirit over adversity'. It is in postcolonial and post-apartheid contexts that heritage construction of difference is homogenized and made synchronous under the rubric of unity in diversity as in South Africa's 'rainbow nation' and Namibia's 'gallery of cultures'. The subsuming of difference into international discourses of multiculturalism leaves in place the colonial categories of divide-and-rule, coupled with inscribed notions of subjective self, based on the misnomers of "race" and of "ethnicity" or "tribe". These then continue to function as the primary frames through which identity is recast and miscast if left unchallenged in postcolonial heritage discourse. These categories are exacerbated with a reality-effect as they become the new products and labelling taxonomies of heritage in the tourism industry. The flattening of difference can never approach the egalitarianism of anti-racist and anti-sexist transnational ideals. This is the alternative to multi-culturalism.

At Robben Island Museum the biography of the political prisoner echoes the biography of the nation - a journey that begins in captivity and ends in freedom. However, the long walk to freedom for the majority of South Africans has only just begun. The prisons of poverty, racism, patriarchy, prejudice, inequality and violence throw into profile the fault-lines implicit in the imagined rainbow nation. Photographs play a critical role in representations of the post-apartheid in the triumphalist narrative presented at Robben Island Museum and work to inscribe a "reality effect".

In “The Exhibitionary Complex" Bennet (1998) explores the genealogy of the museum from a Foucauldian analysis of the evolution of discipline and a Gramscian understanding of the negotiation of consent. Bennet focuses this approach especially as it relates to the idea of "spectacle", the grand exhibition, and the evolution of the modern prison, and how these developments profoundly impact on new visualities, visibilities and sensibilities in the context of nation formation in global metropolitan centres. It is in this same context that the practice of photography emerges as a key shape-shifter and an emergence of a radical modern economy of gazes. Integral to the rhetoric of progress, signaled by industrial capitalism, is a
shift in the nature of the relationship between the state and its populace - from subjects to citizens. Bennet argues a parallel history between the rise of the museum and the modern prison as evidence of this shift: "the development of bourgeois democratic polities required not merely that the populace be governable but that it assent to its governance, thereby creating a need to enlist active popular support for the values and objectives enshrined in the state"(1999: 358). Bennet suggests that the museum emerges simultaneously as a vehicle of proto-democracy and discipline.

The assertion by McGregor and Schumaker that heritage "is intimately linked to identity politics and has a particularly close relationship with nation- and state-building projects" was one made in their analysis of heritage practice in postcolonial contexts in southern Africa. Their insight is far from being limited to a regional analysis and instead translates into an analysis of the field of heritage as it developed in the colonial and modern epochs globally, as well as postcolonial responses to the mobilization of heritage.

Despite its "profound emotional legitimacy", Anderson argues that the interchangeable notions of "nation-ness, nationalism and nationality" are best understood as "cultural artefacts"(1993: 4). The anthropological spin Anderson advances on the concept of "nation" is that it is an "imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"(Ibid: 4). Turnbridge and Ashworth (1996) describe the synchronous relationship between the 'nation state' and 'nationalism' as a "state-building ideology". It is a fabrication in which nation-ness is constituted. So for the authors, "institutionalized national heritage" requires "prior acceptance of a national history" and that "heritage is thus an actual or potential political instrument"(Turnbridge and Ashworth ,1996: 46). They argue that this line of thought was furthered by Bourdieu's introduction of the concept of "cultural capital" which needs to be appropriated by, and is deployed in the exercise of, the dominant ideology in areas such as heritage.

McGregor and Schumaker indicate how relationships to land and the architectures of landscape, particularly during the flurry of nation-making in colonial, settler-state and postcolonial periods, become a critical component of imagining nation. The importance of land as a resource, is equally shared by those resisting these processes. Imagining the world without the trope of the political map of the world is becoming a fantasy only viewable from
space and privy to few. The mapping of the world, in the popular minds-eye, is political and ideological. The lived experience of the land is equally ideological when we consider how ideas of nature and wilderness have come to be.

Macnaghten and Urry (1998: 7-10) illustrate how the idea of a personified, and singular, 'nature' developed in the industrializing world and how the temporal representations of nature culminate in modernity with a separation of nature and society. They argue that this transformation was enabled by a 'deadening of the state of nature' and was confirmed between a state of primeval nature and a formed human state with laws and conventions"(Ibid: 12). They show that ideas of nature are "fundamentally intertwined with dominant ideas of society" and how ideas of society are "reproduced, legitimated, excluded, validated ... through appeals to nature or the natural"(Ibid: 12). Their argument starkly reveals the similarity between the idea of nature and the idea of nation in the evolution of heritage representations of colonial, settler and postcolonial states.

The introductory remarks talk to the core of what I believe to be the most pertinent thought in McGregor and Schumaker - the genealogy of colonial and postcolonial heritage and its role in propagating nationalisms and racism. By glossing over the impetus for a critique of heritage, and without exploring its content, McGregor and Schumaker fail to flesh out a progressive approach to critical heritage. By definition, that critique would be a critique of late capitalism, of racist and sexist practices that engender particular modes of the representation of the Other and a critique that would address the challenges presented by developing constructive, inclusive and accountable approaches to the production of heritage.

Identifying and describing the contestation of the heritage space, in my opinion, should have been the prelude to a discussion of how to critically engage it. Cultural practitioners have never been averse to regarding their work as a form of activism. So in the spirit of struggle parlance, the contestation of heritage can be deemed to be a burgeoning site of struggle where a new politics of identity is unfolding, and new ideas of the politics of community are being inscribed, and new forms of representation and organizational forms are being experimented with. Gary Minkley, quoted in Witz and Rassool (2008: 14), describes critical heritage as one that "instead displays and continually allows for the disturbances, fragments and contradictions". This rupture in narrative he describes as "history frictions" when heritage as
"romance" moves on to "heritage as tragedy" (Ibid: 14). In a similar way, Rassool (2006) describes current heritage practice in narrating a modernist, biographical order, as being essentially conservative. The challenge to heritage practitioners is to allow for process and representation of multiplicities of meanings.

Despite its "profound emotional legitimacy", Anderson argues that the interchangeable notions of "nation-ness, nationalism and nationality" are best understood as "cultural artefacts" (Ibid: 4). The anthropological spin Anderson advances on the concept of "nation" is that it is an "imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Ibid: 4). Turnbridge and Ashworth (1996) describe the synchronous relationship between the 'nation state' and 'nationalism' as a "state-building ideology". It is a fabrication in which nation-ness is constituted. So for the authors, "institutionalized national heritage" requires "prior acceptance of a national history" and that "heritage is thus an actual or potential political instrument" (Turnbridge and Ashworth, 1996: 46). They argue that this line of thought was furthered by Bourdieu's introduction of the concept of "cultural capital" which needs to be appropriated by, and is deployed in the exercise of, the dominant ideology in areas such as heritage.

McGregor and Schumaker's contribution to thinking about what constitutes critical heritage practice is in their accurate description of how the production of heritage places identity politics and nation-building at the centre of that debate. Their voices are added to the momentum in current heritage discourse that seeks to understand the "intangible heritage" of heritage practice. How it has worked in a complex of knowledge production in which power and authority remains cloaked.

THE INSTITUTIONAL GAZE

Stephen Mann and Joseph Fedebrock wrote a fascinating article in the journal Surveillance Society, about the future of the gaze in a networked culture - as evidenced by the recent use of mobile communications technology and social media platforms in the "Occupy" campaigns, the Arab Spring and social upheavals against credit crunch and austerity resistance in Europe. The gaze, as we know it, is morphing but the underlying structural violence of the gaze, as exemplified by the institutional gaze, remains largely unchallenged:
"In this paper we address the increasingly complex constructs between power and the practices of seeing, looking, and watching/sensing in a networked culture mediated by mobile/portable/wearable computing devices and technologies. We develop and explore a nuanced understanding and ontology that examines ‘veillance’ (‘watching’) in both directions: surveillance (oversight), as well as sousveillance (‘undersight’). We argue that the time for sousveillance as a social tool for political action is reaching a critical mass, facilitated by a convergence of transmission, mobility and media channels for content distribution and engagement"(2013: 18).

The museum, as institution, emerges in the global metropoles as the new temples, the crystal palaces, of rising secular nation states undergoing urban and rural industrialization crudely based on wage and slave labour and museums function as spaces in which knowledge and power is represented through the authorial ordering of classical and modern material culture and achievements of these societies and is juxtaposed with the material culture of the vanquished. It functions as a site where citizens are made through the exhibition of things. The role of the other, of difference, emerges as a defining characteristic in the modern museum. Museums have consistently been sites that represent the imaginary of the nation, imagining the nation through classificatory displays of difference. In the post-colonial world, as with the imperial genesis of the museum, museums assemble triumphalist, chronological narratives of national development. They make real, the imagined nation. The ethnographic display, in which colonial subjects are displayed at international expositions and museums, were infused with evolutionary Darwinism and served to affirm the global metropoles' primary position as the bearer of civilization and carer for what was deemed to be not. This cannot continue unchallenged.

Attempts to re-think ethnographic collections are gaining momentum across museums in the desire to create the post-colonial museum. The antidote, to date, has been to conflagrate multi-culturalism or "transcultural dialogue" with a movement away from the classificatory methodology and display forms of the colonial, modern museum. The net result of the multi-cultural approach is that it has contributed to the retention of an understanding of culture that is reified. It has been used as a resource, in many instances, to foster an identity based on colonial 'classes' and has worked the concept of authenticity into an easily objectifiable product that can be owned and mobilised. Museums seeking transformation need to be wary
of the danger of reductivist and essentialized notions of culture. This is the legacy of disciplines such as anthropology that emerged as a science out of colonial expansionism and the desire to understand in order to exert control over the colonized body.

The memory and trauma of the colonized, and the colonizer, is another important dialogic dimension in considering the role of the museum and how it transforms itself from colonial collecting methodologies and forms of display to more inclusive and democratic formats. Democratizing these processes, through participatory democracy, is critical to developing the progressive museum. The absences and presences implicit in working with memory are curatorial concerns that affect every level of museum intervention. The intangibleness of memory is what museums are working with, both within the institution itself and as its function. The intangible heritage of the museum must define approaches to how museums transform their practices. The social transformatory potential of the museum facilitates a drift from a static one-way communication into a space that facilitates dialogical relationships between museum practitioners and the audiences and communities of thought constituted by them - as a resource for community empowerment and advocacy and that act as forums for civil engagement.

In his 2012 Honours dissertation, “Robben Island Histories, identities and futures. The past, present and future meaning of place”, Brett Seymour succinctly concludes that:

"With only a selected part of its history, meaning, and memory being presented as that important element, the Island's other cultural and physical legacies are at risk of being lost. Current debates therefore focus on institutions such as Robben Island's museum and its obligation to tell the whole story – one which incorporates all of its history, and all of those who went into creating it. Ultimately, the issue is to what extent public memory and meaning created by governments and institutions such as the museum obscures other parts of the Island's history, meanings, and memories, and how this can be repaired. An historical investigation of place can fill previously left gaps. For Robben Island, the unearthing of previously hidden evidence which helps to recover histories and meanings is a case of recovering a democratic presentation of the Island. This involves drawing on the multitude of memories of Robben Island which are found in its history of inhabitants. Ironically, Robben Island's apartheid
period does indeed serve as a symbol for South Africa in moving forward. Political prisoners once reinscribed their environment with meaning whilst under the control of the prevailing discursive power of the prison – indeed a powerful act. It seems as though this is what those in charge of presenting Robben Island's history and meaning today must do. They must reassert the entirety of the Island's history and meaning whilst under the control of the prevailing discursive power that the conflated apartheid history, memory and meaning have created."


CURATING DIFFICULT KNOWLEDGE

On more than one occasion during my internship at RIM and in the course of seminars and lectures held at RIM the need to return to the core values of Robben Island Museum was raised as a pressing concern that should not be neglected as the Museum finds its way through the issues of becoming a sustainable world heritage site and the commercial impact that is required to achieve this objective. This return to core values, talks to the very notion of intangible heritage or what is sometimes referred to as living heritage as well as the politics of institutional responsibility in the execution of the institutional gaze in the development of critical heritage narratives. The role of the museum, of heritage, in nation-building in the rise of the nation state, lies at the heart of the problem. The very idea of the nation state, and the exasperation of considering a world without them, is the challenge. Museums could potentially transform into sites where a new citizenry, a transnational one, can be made. But we are a long way off from that possibility. In the here and the now, after twenty years of democracy, South Africans are still reviewing how to resolve transitional justice.

In the Conference Report of the International Conference on Transitional Justice held in 2012 in Zimbabwe, Whande re-affirms her belief that the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which we can understand as the mid-wife of the reconciliation paradigm in South Africa, and as evidenced in the trope of the 'rainbow nation', has left many wounds unresolved and un-reconciled. Whande goes on to support Graca Machel's call for a second sitting of the TRC:

"Dealing with the past is the ongoing effort to restore and create anew a coherent narrative of who we are in the here and now. This happens with and without
transitional justice. After disruption, war and violence, people embark on a search for meaning. They repair damage in the everyday. They search for and recreate aliveness. Transitional justice in the 1990s, as I experienced it in South Africa, was a staged moment for retrospection and prospection – it was meant as ‘looking back in order to look forward’, based on the core assumption that indeed looking backward enables going forward. At the same time, transitional justice as a political project and projection was inevitably tied up with the processes of nation-building, which are by default exclusive. As we focus on creating the kind of post-colonial citizenship that would be based on rights realized, we turn a blind eye to the phenomenon of migration and people’s movements across borders on the continent. While many are victims of displacement due to violence, there are also age-old circular migration routes for purposes of trade. The nation-state does not provide the kind of protection that would be needed for women who cross borders regularly and often illegally to fend for their families. The South African nation has become one of xenophobia and exclusion, as truth, reconciliation and rights apply to citizens or those deemed worthy of being part of the formal system, where one has access to make those rights real in any form" (2012: 13-4).

How does nation-building in the Republic of South Africa translate into the fact that the economic powerhouse of this country dominates the region and reaches deeply north into Sub-Saharan Africa. Whande’s critique of nation-building, is further expressed in a paper she delivered at the recent 5th Conference of the Institute for Security Studies where she suggests that the cross-generational effects of unresolved fall-out of the TRC affects four generations of generations - looking forward and backward. So the healing that is required is a far-reaching one and will require cross-generational work in the quest for becoming fully human.

The TRC was no silver bullet that purged all memory of apartheid violence.

Difficult knowledge, knowledge that questions the existing dominant narrative of reconciliation and tries to address painful memories from the past in the present, and hard-to-talk-about issues, presents museums and heritage practitioners with the opportunity to explore the very public task of representing pasts that intrude upon privacy and secrecy. In their book "Curating difficult knowledge. Violent pasts in public spaces", two of the editors introduce the book with a question to the reader: "What happens when the invisible is made visible,
when knowledge relegated to society's margins or swept under its carpet is suddenly inserted into the public domain?" (Lehrer and Milton, 2011: 1). On curating difficult knowledge, the editors state:

"Unique challenges arise in attempts to frame memories and documents of violence for public display, and these have inspired innovations in exhibition, museology, public cultural interventions and the activation of memorial sites. And new knowledge emerges when we consider memory - in its spatial, material, public dimensions - not simply as latent in the social fabric, not only in top-down efforts by the state to encode preferred memory, but also as it is mindfully deployed by individuals and groups in attempts to provoke, enable, and transform" (Ibid: 3).

Casey argues that it is through modes of exhibition design that the gaze is focused and how challenging forms of display can assist in transforming museum: "The museum mise-en-scene – the organization of collections and the sequence of displays and objects – creates a specific view and associated understanding of museum art and artifacts. Over time, the modern museum has evolved in its role first as legislator, then interpreter, and now of performer". Casey concludes:

"The museum acquires social authority through its ability to direct ways of seeing. Historically, the museum has prescribed cultural value through objects, but in contemporary times, meaning is communicated through modes of display. Some criticize display strategies in the new museum as eroding the cultural and intellectual legitimacy of the institution. Critics perceive the chronology of typologies as a negative progression that indicates the deterioration of the mandate of the museum as cultural institution (...)." However, the dramatic effect of contemporary museum practice can also liberate the new museum. The degree of artifice in presentation – which the visitor has rarely registered in the traditional museum – becomes visible in the performing museum. As a result, the techniques of presentation have begun to stop concealing the processes of cultural production, and have started to expose them. As the performance reinforces the illusion of the museum, it undoes it at the same time – the contemporary subject is positioned within the scene as its active viewer and outside it as its passive witness. The detachment of the spectator has made the modes
of representation used in the museum more visible. The visibility of the museum’s ideological position changes the way visitors process what they see, and thus provides an opportunity to challenge cultural authority and redirect dominant cultural narratives. 

"(2003: 19)"

**CREATING VISUAL CITIZENSHIP**

In an article on the visual and cultural impact of images produced in the struggle and presented in an exhibition of Community Arts Project posters, Emile Maurice the curator of the exhibition entitled "Interruptions: Posters from the Community Arts Project (CAP) Archive" which showed at the City Hall in Cape Town during the City's Design week (Cape Town was appointed Design Capital of the World for 2014) is quoted by Penny Haws(2014) as saying this about why the socio-political context in which these posters were produced in the struggle against Apartheid: "What emerged was a new form of visual citizenship," he says, "and, because these new visual citizens were historically unaccustomed to encountering aesthetic visualisations, the posters produced an altered subjectivity and a reshaping of working-class perceptions by stirring and stimulating of the senses of members of the working class…. The cultural voice of the disempowered grew and was amplified."

Robben Island is a world heritage site and the site where the ruling party has inscribed its version of the liberation struggle. We are all aware of the neglected political traditions excluded from this narrative and it is time to fix it. That process has already begun and needs to be nurtured. Flattening history sacrifices so much nuance and the full richness of the human experience. Those other stories, those excluded voices, will fill the space with a true celebration of what it means to be free.

The conclusion to this research paper takes the form of an exhibition that I completed on the Curation module of the APHMS programme and is the product of my research this year. This experimental exhibition, "Bunny chatter: Robben Island to Marikana" introduces new voices into the heritage narrative at Robben Island Museum and considers the role of art, artefact and visuality in the making of stories told and contested in post-apartheid museums.
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THE DIGITISATION OF THE MAYIBUYE ARCHIVE AND THE IMPLICATIONS ON PUBLIC ACCESS AND RESEARCH

BY

ROZANNE LEIGH CORNELISSEN

Introduction

Digitisation is occurring all over the world today, so to bring it to South Africa is one step in changing people’s understandings of Africa, because the information will be accessible to the world and the rest of South Africa. There are also challenges that have been debated around digitisation in Africa such as technological challenges, international relations or external institutions, the creation of a new kind of archive and the various digitising projects that have occurred in Africa specifically for creating online libraries. The ALUKA project is one of them; the aim of the project was to build an online library that will educate people about Africa. In 2004 the ALUKA project collaborated with the Digital Imaging South African (DISA) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal to create a digital online resource of archival resources.272 The challenge that digitisation is trying to address in Africa is the global digital divide and to ensure proper access to the content that it belongs to African countries and institutions.

In June 2001, at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) the UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archive officially opened.273 The Mayibuye Archive is in collaboration with the Robben Island Museum (RIM) but housed at UWC. This is a unique archive that is housed in the Western Cape; the reason being it has records of South Africa’s unpublished documents of the liberation struggle during the apartheid era.

The bulk of the collections that are at the Mayibuye Archive were collected by the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF)274 during the years of exile, when there were constraints such as censorship and repression placed on South Africa publications of the

apartheid truth. In 1990 the government lifted all banning then the IDAF relocated the collection back to the Mayibuye Archive.

The co-ordinator that assisted me with my internship, gave advice that it is best to understand the nature of digitisation and not just the technical aspect, but get deep into the social aspect of the process. I had the opportunity to conduct interviews with five members of the Mayibuye Archive who took part in the Mayibuye Archive digitisation project and the implementation of the project.

During the University’s June 2014 Vacation, I participated in an internship which is one of the modules in the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies which took place at the UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archive. The internship took place over a three-week period, in which I participated in different activities, such as digitisation and interviews. The activities in which I was part of lend towards this research essay.

I got the opportunity to digitise the Mayibuye Archive Audiotape of an oral history interview of Walter Sisulu by Wolfie Kodesh which took place on the 27 January and 6 February 1995 these are cassettes one and two out of a set of five cassettes.

I conducted the opening of a new folder and the creation of the new Digitised track of the interview. The program through which the Mayibuye audio department works with is known as ‘Pro tools’ it is a digital audio workstation for Microsoft Windows and OS X operating systems, which is the software that the archive uses to conduct the digitisation of audio tapes. All the audio tapes that are recorded are digitised in real time. For example, each cassette is approximately 90 minutes and therefore the digitisation time for each cassette is 90 minutes. The digitised content needs to be normalized and be bounced to disk. This is the process of transferring the content onto the server to be preserved and where the public is able to access it. The whole process is time consuming because of the nature in which it is being changed and transferred.

The methodology through which I conducted the research is, reading secondary literature that details the debates about the issues regarding digitisation and the transformation of archives and the social implications. My practical internship at the Mayibuye Archive, which was with the Audio Visual Department. This gave me a greater understanding of the process in which
my research is focused on. Here I assisted in transferring analog data to digital data onto the Mayibuye Database system. I conducted Interviews with the Mayibuye archivists and engaged with the archivists on the critical debates of Digitising such as the political, practical and ethical debates. The interviews gave light on the process of digitisation and how the archivists felt about the process of digitisation.

**The Research Problem**

In the 21st century we are moving more and more towards computerisation of documents and learning. There has been a growing trend in digitisation across the world. Post 1994 there has been an ever expanding debate about the re-composition and refiguring of the archive.\textsuperscript{275} The issue around this debate is whether digitisation provides an opportunity to construct a new kind of archive. With global trends come various criticisms that are significant that are practical, political and ethical when concerned with knowledge.

The projects such as the *ALUKA project* and the *Digital Imaging Project of South Africa DISA*,\textsuperscript{276} which digitised approximately forty antiapartheid periodicals form 1960-1990. The digitised contents in these two projects only form a relatively small part of the sites and the heritage content is limited.

The Mayibuye Archive is an archive of the history of the liberation struggle. The only disappointing aspect of the archive is that not many people are aware of its existence. The Mayibuye Archive is an opportunity for further research, the reason being to bring awareness and the digitisation of the archive brings access to knowledge of the history stored here to the public.

The primary focus of this research is the digitisation of the Mayibuye Archive the activity of changing archival material from analog to digital formats. The implications digitisation will have on public access, the Digitised work will be made accessible to everyone in the public domain and who will constitute to have this access and what are the benefits from digitisation. The Digitised work should be made available online for easy accessibility. Will


it be altering the research process by replacing steps of physically touching and getting that historical feel of the documentation? By dismissing this research process, is it taking away the validation of researched material, by researchers who will not give the proper acknowledgement of the original author. Some of the central problems that this research will seek to address are: Who will have access to digitised archives? What should be digitised? Does the archive have stable and accessible web-storage? Where will the funding for such a project come from? What steps are in place to preserve historical documents during digitisation? What legal and ethical policies are in place to make sure stakeholders are involved in the process and how will this effect of what to digitise? And how will it affect the research process?

“Archives in the Digital Age”277: the quote is indicating that the archival world is change from a paper based world towards a digital world which will be paperless to the public. There is also a hesitation going into the digital world because it is regarded as having to catch up which will imply that Africa is backwards, but this is not the case Africa already has gone a step into the digital footprint, the only concern when digitising their archives are the political, ethical and practical understanding of an archive. We are starting to live with the generation that relies on technologies such as iPad and laptops and the type of learning that is changing, where they would prefer to do research online but yet the older generations would prefer to physically sit in an archive and do research, therefore an issue would be are we creating a new kind of archive. There is a risk that vast amounts of historical evidential records will be lost if not preserved digitally for future access in learning and cultural heritage. Therefore, this presents a good area for further research.

**Debating Digitisation**

Digitisation forms part of an integral process of the Mayibuye Archive. In digitising their collections, the Archives aim is to preserve rare and fragile collections that are at a risk of becoming destroyed and at the same time improving access to their content by providing digital copies. The digital era has opened up a great opportunity for the scholar and to address the challenges that the colonial past has created and proposal of preservation of Africa’s own historical past. Within Africa archival documents play a vital role in the unfolding of its past.

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As far as I have researched, little literature exists on the Mayibuye Archive, as well as on archives and digitisation of archives in the post-apartheid era.

According to Lalu (2007), in understanding the digitisation of an archive, we must first have an understanding of what an archive is and what it does? The archive is different from a library in its formation, types of material available and the way in which these materials are accessed. The archive can either be a site of retrieval and representation\(^{278}\), or a site of power or where the production of history is already on-going. The meaning of those three things are that an archive can be a place of where you gather information and the stories of what history represents, it can either be a place where governments manipulate history to suit their political means and it is a place where history is being made constantly.

An article by Pickover (2009) which concentrates on the politics and social challenges of digitisation of African heritage, establishes an ideological understanding of the nature of archives and archivists called the Sybil Syndrome, which means to have more than two distinctive identities. In modern society knowledge, information and heritage are seen as a strategic resources tool.\(^{279}\) The pivotal process is the manner in which information is used and who controls it, as a result the “soul of the archive” as Pickover puts it, it mirrors the historical constructs of the past which is often a sought-after commodity. The key to this is that the key is not that the archive is a sought-after as information but instead it is how that information can be accessed.

The apartheid era asserted the archive was not just a storehouse for documents\(^{280}\) in a post-colonial time but was organised in way that when you read the material and how you read the material had a racial undertone of oppression. Now living in a democratic society we should have an archive that will consist of material that is related to the liberation movement, where the site is meaningful and should not fall into classificatory systems of racial prejudices such as race and ethnicity where it would just replicate the apartheid or colonial archive. For me

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the development of the Mayibuye Archive was to overcome the ideology of racial subjection and to incorporate the unspoken voices into a collection of history. Does the altering the nature of the archive to the unheard voices of the country will it become a symbol for democratic documents or a liberation archive?

According to a Canadian Preservation Committee document on digitisation, it states that the understanding of an archive has been in our framework for many centuries and many research papers but the idea of digitisation of the archive has recently been incorporated into research papers. What is digitisation of the archive? It is the transformation of analog information into digital code. In lay persons terms it is taking the historical documentation and putting it within a data system to be viewed on a computer or other piece of technology, but with this comes challenges and problems. The challenges and problems that is associated with digitisation is the cost and complexities that are inherent in the development of a digitisation program, such financial aids for equipment and the employment of people that has the required skills. The impact a digitisation program will have on public service activities such as the altering of research room use has to be part of the decision-making. The digital information is at risk due to technological obsolescence and must be aware of the ever changing technologies. The institution must have clear objectives and technological approaches should accommodate characteristics of the records. Digitisation must strive to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the original information; it must not violate the physical or intellectual rights such as copyright laws.

Premesh Lalu (2007) engages in the problematic initiatives of the archive that reflects the debates that have been unfolded in South Africa about the archive. The issues that are brought up in the article are the concern for intellectual property, protection of national heritage and discussions about the consequences for research and education. The issues that will be addressed are that of copyright; the archive needs to respect the author’s rights and secure the proper permissions to publish the material. Ownership; not many archives will seek to find the owner of documents because at times it is impossible to find the authors even if the author is known. The sustainability of local institutions; does the institution have capable and stable connectivity lines for the internet, sufficient web storage that will suit the archives capacities and the local staff are trained in digitising historical material.

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Another debate that is conveyed by Lalu’s (2007) article is the argument by Paul Virilio who is a cultural theorist that is best known for writings about technology. He forcefully argues that the emergence of techno-science is wrecking the scholarly resources of all knowledge. My understanding of this is that digitisation is taking away the historical perspective of doing research and losing its cultural property. Instead to do further investigation of digitisation being a discipline that has many overlapping processors of knowledge and technology that will preserve the historical perspective and cultural property. Lalu further argues that the need for digitisation is due to one factor, globalisation\textsuperscript{282}, where the world wants to be connected with Africa but to be outside of Africa; by digitising then the world can physically not be in Africa, but still able to access the cultural and historical heritage that was documented. This is not good because the western world will only have a book perspective of Africa and base it on their imaginations and not have an actual visual understanding of the oral histories told by the people of Africa so how do we overcome this perspective? And not just making it about the retrieving of information but the preservation of documentation. The other concern is that digitisation and the production of academic works will be in favour of the wealthy institutions and limiting the other institutions that cannot get enough funds for digitisation to occur.

Peter Limb (2005) states that the digital trends largely bypass Africa, but yet there is evidence that the venture into the digitising world of Africa has been successful. With success there are also shortcomings that exist, and Limb (2005) sums it up that Africa has limited resources and is in deep economic difficulty\textsuperscript{283}. These therefore leads to bigger issues of access\textsuperscript{284} or accessibility like Lalu has stated that these projects have been centred to wealthy institutions will these institutions have a greater pull on what documents will be digitised and on what database it will be digitised on\textsuperscript{285}. Limb’s argument is that digitisation of intellectual heritage resources should be unhindered by external interests such as governments and wealthy institutions to name but a few; this is so because it will cause a scattering of heritage materials and Africa will not be capable of controlling the nature of digitisation and the heritage resources that will be made available in their countries. Sustainability, legal, ethical


and commercial issues are therefore needed to be addressed in order to move further with digitisation in Africa and South Africa.

On a more practical level, Kimberley Barata (2004) gives an interesting case study in the United Kingdom (UK), of Archives in the Digital Age. This can be consolidated and used within the context of Mayibuye. In the case study she mentions the lack of planning can destroy the chances of having a successful electronic records or a digital archive. Two perspectives have developed out of this article: what an archive hopes to achieve and the reality of the government situation in which it operates. One needs to also distinguish between records that are “born digital” and those that are being digitised.

Many viewed the heritage of Africa as inaccessible, inferior and of no value to the rest of the world. According to Britz and Lor, digitisation will be changing this view. The issue that must be approached before going forward with digitising heritage material are that of ethical concerns. These are an acceptable global foundation, that will provide a guideline on how to control the process of digitisation of the documented history of Africa and there has to be an acceptance of every person equally when considering digitisation. Human Rights as a global moral foundation, the best universal framework to fall in line with human rights are that of information rights. The core principle must be to respect the freedom and property of people and recognising equality for all. In order to create a digital policy in Africa, where the society is based on a community structure, the policy must contain communal and individual information rights that will express rights of freedom to access, freedom of expression and individuals and groups to own.

There has to be a process of developing policies for digitisation that will incorporate the technical, cultural and social aspect to the archive, because according to both Limb and Lalu

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argue that in post-apartheid South Africa the archive is a site where history of the past and especially apartheid is rendered meaningful and effective and that digitisation projects must respect the rights of individuals, cultures and nations that own the material.

The notion of “digitality” plays an integral part in the modern societies in which we are living. The digital technology that we are using facilitates easy access to different sources of information from anywhere in the world. Even though we able to do this archives are still being exploited by individuals, business entities and governments. In South Africa it is not so much that of technological challenges but that of social and political challenges.

Many of Africa’s primary heritage is housed beyond the African continent, and for this there has been a strategy established known as “vital repatriation”\(^{293}\), in which the internet offers a chance for Africans to access their own archives collection that have been taken out of Africa.

The use of the strategy of “vital repatriation”\(^{294}\) employs the use of digital technologies that will recover documents outside the physical boarders of the archive. The meaning from the understanding of the notion of “vital repatriation”\(^{295}\) outside that of the article to make it fit into the Mayibuye Archive is that the digital access of the archive will allow the public to gain the knowledge it will provide so that the country will be able to heal and to know the true knowledge of the information that was banned during the 1990s. This strategy has to first adopt standards and best practices are essential in ensuring that cultural heritage institutions provide resources of a high international standard. There must be accessibility, thus designing a website which main features will be based on reliability, authenticity, user-friendly policy and non-political collections.

This “vital repatriation”\(^{296}\) will allow access to information in order for citizens to know about their own heritage so that they can interpret the past in order to understand the present and shape the future.


\(^{294}\) Ibid

\(^{295}\) Ibid

In order to understand the socio-political challenges one needs to clarify the tensions and often disorganised place of the archive. Archives-as-profession and archives-as-institution plays a powerful role in the production of history as mentioned by Lalu.\textsuperscript{297} The framing and controlling of our understandings of the past in constructed here through the national psyche and in ‘storylessness’ of documents found in the archive.

In the reading archives that are in countries in the process of transition to democracy are of fundamental importance as evidence that supports victims and is essential for collective memory as a bases for reconciliation and justice. Therefore, archives are compromised and even insidious spaces, this is so because there will be always political ties the building will not stand just for a storehouse but will be forever transforming and taking on new meanings as the eras change overtime.

In that sense the archive becomes the agent of social change and not passive guardians. They play an active role in contextualising and interpretative frameworks for the production of knowledge. There is no objectivity or neutrality but power over identity, memory and evidence seeking where specific narratives are either made privileged or marginalised.

The digitising of the archives speaks to the way in which social memory and identities are produced, managed, accessed and owned. There changes that are occurring in the structure of knowledge production, this could reinforce and entrench notions of cultural imperialism. When one looks at the so-called “global” access to information it will create a better society and will empower people and provide for their participation in an emerging and unstoppable what Pickover coins a “digital democracy.”\textsuperscript{298} Therefore, the acclamation of digitisation projects becomes the space where power is determined. Historians and archivists have argued that these so-called digitisation projects are fundamentally located in uneven power relations and compromise national heritage, they thus do not produce an outcome that represents the views and interest of the developing nation.


\textsuperscript{298}Pickover, M., 2009. ‘Contestations, ownership, access and ideology: policy development challenges for the digitisation of African heritage and liberation archives’. \textit{First International Conference on African Digital Libraries and Archives (ICADLA-I)}, p.3.
The South African efforts in digitisation have come to a motionlessness stance in the state. This motionlessness stance could be reflecting the ongoing factional disputes in policy making and access problems, which is a product of the weakness of the infrastructure on the African continent and governments disinterest in digitisation. Breckenridge (2014) he mentions Pickover’s (2009) argument of ‘the internet’ that relies on technology that is less accessible and more expensive of that in the North being countries other than Africa. The disinterest in digitisation has been misplaced by this notion that Africa has an access problem which is not the case Breckenridge disputes this fact for several reason, one being network capacity has increased, there is no resource problem and the decline is due to poor policies.

The network capacity has expanded dramatically over the last five years and mainly in the sector that host the process of digitisation and that is the tertiary sector. For example, the installation of undersea cables in 2007, the introduction of smartphones and cost-effective data packages. Africa’s market saw for the first time a noteworthy growth in internet usage within the general population and this make it ironic that there is a decline in digitisation right in the moment when internet access became part of the norm of the youth in South African life.

There is the idea that there is no problem with resource issues, the cost of tools of digitisation and publishing fell dramatically during this period especially the cost of cloud-based servers. Simultaneously a range of powerful, user-friendly and free open-source tools became available for example Ubuntu Linx that offered standard based and easily learned tools. Neither was there a shortage of funds from the government in 2013 the budget for archives was nearly R1 billion\textsuperscript{299}. The decline overlapped with a period of elaborate investment by the National Department of Arts and Culture into the development of a policy of digitisation culminating in August 2010 and the publication of 30 policy objectives.

Although weakness of policy, funding, administrative capacity has some influence in the current situation of digitisation of archival records. The primarily result of the digitisation declining was the collapse of an important project, the DISA Project. Five years later the project lays in ruin. The relationship with primary funders, staff dispersed and its technical capacity and the hardware to preserve the digital records were decaying. The issues that

undermined the DISA project was control and dependency which were quickly characterised in the rhetoric of neo-colonialism and the archive was a strategic instrument of imperial and colonial control which has strongly influence Lalu’s work. The DISA project’s problems after 2002 were described as ideological and political and not technological but Breckenridge (2014) shows the opposite seems to have been the case.

When the staff members that were involved with the DISA project started to look for a second round of funding they learned that Mellon Foundation, which is a co-ordinating body for digital scholarship, was interested in them collaborating with a new digitisation project that was started by Ithaka. The new project was called ALUKA and was fostered by Allan Isaacman, Gail Gerhart and Premesh Lalu, who intended to develop electronic content concerning Africa and other parts of the global south that could be made available online.

The ALUKA’s idea was to have an archive of high-value African objects such as museum representations of landscapes, biological accounts of plants and an archive that had carefully selected documents to be produced by DISA. The collaboration between DISA and ALUKA became immediately dysfunctional. Lalu urged the scholars who gathered for the first meeting for the selection of ALUKA content in Durban to assemble a ‘new form of archive’ that would ‘unsettle the seamless narrative of the liberation struggle’. The key to the new archive and narrative was a regional collection that would emphasize the ‘transnational struggle against apartheid’. The regional documentation was quickly undermined by a second strategy which was unrealisable to employ scholars that will find rare artefacts of high socio-political interest. It was the failure of the third goal of the project which was to develop knowledge and expertise in digital imaging amongst Liberians and archivists in South Africa. This contributed the most to the accusations of neo-colonialism and weakened the production of digital archives locally.

Criticisms about global politics of the digital divide reverberated with postcolonial anxieties about imperialism renewed but the real underlying issues is “technopolitical”[^300], which related to the hardware expectations between the projects and technical issues relating to sustaining disk storage for high resolution documentations. The destructive effects of digitisation on the feelings of ownership and the value of labour became evident when an

archivist at the ALUKA project asked if all the data of the first five years of the DISA project be shipped off to Princeton on hard disks. It was the realisation that the ALUKA project had the right to publish content of the DISA project as well have unrestricted control of the main data left in South African archives. Adding to the growing subordination and exclusion was through the process of licensing, the clumsy arrangement of licensing rights to material that was produced by the DISA project was a serious problem. Lalu’s call for a new archive that stood outside of the state and outside of the liberation movements and stride the regions political borders, in practice it was undermined by the appointment of the national selection committees.

The contradictions between the ALUKA’s expectations of mass collection, its rigid subject architecture, the slow pace of the historians’ selections and Mellon’s growing impatience. The key people in the DISA project began to be expressive of the critique of digitisation as a neo-imperialism. Due to the fact that South African archival resources are being digitised and held outside of the country and often under unilateral subscription license in conjunction with commercial publisher’s. International partners have no interest in long-term sustainability and growth of electronic resources in South African libraries and archives. They are driven by haste, commercialism and an effort to secure intellectual resources in the North.

Despite its undeniably generous and human intentions for having digital archives onto the public domain has unfortunately resulted in the people in southern Africa are denied access to the digital archives of their own struggle history. National and colonial archives unmistakably work towards to support a control over the narrative that placed the role of the imperial or local state at the centre of historical writing and this control has been broken.

**Generational Gap**

There are different kinds of perspectives that come with change be it in a community, family or even in institutions. The concept of change is inevitable as we are human beings that are constantly learning and developing new things. Digitisation is one of those ‘new’ but old developments that have been on-going in archives that have been shown in the debates. The overall evidence of the difference in perspectives that is clearly indicated in the digitisation of the Mayibuye Archive is the generational gap that exists amongst archivist.
This kind of gap has not been shown within the debates, and this should be considered an important issue that needs to be addressed. Due to the fact that these may cause conflicts amongst archivists and can delay the future mission for archives to go into the digital platform and expand their reach in the world and not be stagnated. Although this was not the case with the Mayibuye Archive all archivists were still for digitisation but they still in their personal views, that the original archive should still be opened to the public. There are two kinds of perspective that comes out of this generational gap, one the emotional loss and second the looking towards possibility or the future.

The emotional loss is not in the sense that there is a sadness that the archive will not exist. It is that the documents that will be made online will not have the emotional undertones onto the writing of that document. For example, when you write love letters or insert writings into a diary, on each word or sentence you can feel the emotions that goes into that sentence or word as a historian reads those words on the actual document. You can collect and hold the letters and diary. Currently you will possibly write a letter via an email or whatsapp message and here you cannot feel the emotions, “with letters you know the relationship”301 because it feels computer generated and very generic, “What you’ve said there is nothing there”302, these letters and messages cannot be really collected or held because how will you retrieve these emails and whatsapp messages that are usually deleted after a period of time.

The “emergence of techno-science is wrecking the scholarly resources of all knowledge”303. In the end the emotional loss is brought down to the collection of the ‘historical’ documents of the future, being that how much history will be actually present. Since everything will be on a digital platform it is almost as if “there is going to be no history”304 because there will be nothing to collect and hold to physically, read and feel feelings, “we are not going to actually have much of a history a present history”305. It will not be able to see the exact relationships people had with each other.

Looking towards the possibility and the future of digitisation, there are many developed countries that have commenced large-scaled digitisation projects some of which have been

301 Respondent 1. Interview. 10 June 2014.
302 Respondent 1. Interview. 10 June 2014.
304 Respondent 1. Interview. 10 June 2014.
305 Respondent 1. Interview. 10 June 2014.
going on for many years. Even developing countries have joined the digitisation trend to name but a few such as South Korea, Brazil, the Republic of China, Egypt, India and Africa is up there with these countries.

Archivists in the Mayibuye Archive looking towards the future had different views one of those views is that the information that is digitised is a way of giving back to the community. Since the collections at the Mayibuye Archive is of the Liberation Struggle. The information that was collected by the Robben Island Museum to create their exhibitions and to gain the knowledge of how life was for the political prisoners who were imprisoned. “It is satisfying to have this information available to the rest of the world to have access”306. The archivists are saving the information for the future generation to come to know.

Another view is more on the lines that one must be moving with the times and the changing technologies, “current trend from a library to museums and archives that is definitely the direction it will take at the moment ideally we are going to go towards a stage where people may not necessarily go to archives the way they have and find things online”307. The reasons being digital formats are the future because there is hardly any item that is not in digital. For example, looking at audiovisual there is no more analog films or recordings everything is digital form such as having the information on CDs and DVDs.

The digitisation process is not to limit the frame of the research process behind researching historical documents in the archive, but it is more to do with conservation purpose and facilitates to make these historical documents available. The archive needs to digitise everything irrespective of the quality in order to protect the archive itself, “Conservation point of view you don’t necessarily take into consideration the part of policy”308. When one uses this angle it will minimize the frequency of researchers touching and holding the documents. The archive cannot limit those who want to rather visit the archive because some researchers might want to touch the actual documents who are far better handlers than those who probably would not care about the document and can cause more harm.

306 Respondent 2. Interview. 18 June 2014.
Another view is that you are changing the original material when you conduct digitisation. An example is that when you scan in a photograph it is no longer the same photograph because you will be able to change the size of the document to be able to see the material more clearly. Therefore, it is not regarded as the original. This is seen as creating a new archive with a different meaning. This is not changing the archive it is just making the original material more accessible to the public. It is more of a “psychological new archive”\(^{309}\), because no one will physically visit the archive. The digitised archive is more of a convenience it is just easier to be sitting anywhere in the world and be able to access the material for your research without spending unnecessary money for travelling to the country to visit the archive only to find out there is no useful material to use.

There will always be this tension between the older generation who wants to come in to the archive and page through the documents and the younger generation who want the material to be digitised. When it comes to the directive of digitisation we cannot live within this divide of one looking forward and one looking backwards. This will cause the country to stagnate and we will always be known for a country that is backwards and have no future goals and will never break the digital divide.

**Technological Challenges**

There are frequent changes in both hardware and software that can include modernisations or withdrawals. Such as going forward or going backwards. The backward going issues come down to obsolescence\(^{310}\), which is where older products or equipment can no longer support or become unusable. As in the challenges brought forward by the Canadian Preservation Committee, the digital information is at risk of technological obsolescence and must be aware of the changing technologies. This prevents the process of digitisation to occur, therefore technological progress should be anticipated and incorporated into planning to enable the use of the current technology in order to preserve, examine, process and communicate information from the past.

\(^{309}\) Respondent 3. Interview. 4 July 2014.

It is difficult to find older machines that will be able to do the job of digitising an entire archive, "still trying to find play back machines for material that is very old and sensitive". One example of older products is times when you have to copy information that is on a floppy disk and not the stiffy disk; onto a new computer. It is very difficult to find the older computer that still has those drives to access the information in order to extract the information. The reason being is that technology is forever changing and expanding as the year’s progress and people decide to develop new operating systems and equipment.

Digitisation has a lot of potential in that the information that is digitised is easily accessible, but is it possible to keep it for a very long time. Hard drives and servers have the possibility of crashing or burning down or malfunctioning, therefore you need to constantly backup and if you are paranoid that the backup will disappear then back the backup up.

An example of is that one archivist’s digitised version of the work that was being done was saved onto an external hard drive. One day the archivists put the external hard drive into the computer and the external hard drive crashed that even the IT specialists could not recover the digitised work, “never lost work with any power failures, but it crashed and unable to recover”. It was not just a few archival works it was folders upon folders of work and these works had to be re-digitised. Therefore, the archive took the initiative that no material will be stored onto external hard drives it will be transferred directly to the server where it should be safe. This initiative could have been implemented by the Department of Arts and Culture, National Policy on digitisation and can be referred to Policy 15 of the August 2010 Version 8 of the policy, which is the protection of the digital heritage.

To find old machines can be very costly, in that the machines they find are usually second hand machines and these break down very easily and therefore need to be replaced constantly. Not only that you will need to find technology that will be able to bridge the divide between old machine and new machine in order for the two to communicate with each other to be able to copy the information. There also needs to be a development of a policy covering preservation of formats that only exist in digital formats, for example in case of the server burning down one needs to have a backup and disaster plan in place in order to recovery the digital data. This back and disaster plan exists in the Managing Digital

311 Respondent 2. Interview. 18 June 2014.
312 Respondent 2. Interview. 18 June 2014.
Collections: A Collaborative Initiative on the South African Framework, which the Mayibuye Archive uses as their framework for revisiting their digitisation policy. The plan reads as follows that the archive should have a plan off-site from the actual archive. This usually takes the form of the archive being mirrored to a secondary server that is housed in an alternative facility but should be capable of giving the same services in real-time.

Another challenge is emulation\(^3\), the objective is for older data-sets to run on contemporary computers. This process can be similar to migration, but focuses on the applications software rather than on the files containing the data. It seeks to develop new tools that will create conditions under which the original data were created. This can be done by mirroring early operating systems or by having add-ons.

For example, the technology that is being used at the Mayibuye archive is Apple technology. So when the Apple Company introduces a new operating system everything that existed in the previous operating system will not be operational in the new system. Therefore, you need to buy add-ons that will make the old documents work in the new operating system. At least with Microsoft (MS) technology it has the capability already built in where documents that were save in for MS Word 2007 can operate in MS Word 2010 but with Macs which is an Apple product cannot do that, “Prefers Macs because it’s better to work with in the audiovisual”\(^3\).

Microsoft also allows for the archive to use a lot of open source software on their databases and this piece of open source software is usually free as where they use Macs you cannot access this open source software. The only reason the archive uses the Apple Macs is that it is very secure and there are fewer viruses made for Mac computers which assist in the preservation of the digital archive.

The technology challenges can also be linked to the shortage of skilled labour, “challenges to digitisation is a labour intense process you need everyone in front of monitors digitisation and capturing metadata and then you the administrative process to back that process up to


\(^3\) Respondent 3. Interview. 4 July 2014.
make sure things stay relevant and usable for as long as possible”\textsuperscript{315}. Thibodeau explains the reason which is the cause of limited labour because of tensions between the interactions between citizens and governments.\textsuperscript{316} In that no one has the energy to deal with political tensions that exist in government institutions. Not only that there are very few people that are equipped with having both heritage and technology expertise that were expressed by one respondent in the interviews conducted.

Since the technology is constantly changing, the memory of the digital archive would be greatly impoverished if there are no considerations put in place to handle these dimensions of change that are precipitated by these changing technologies.

**International, Ownership and Copyright**

The concept of ownership seems quite simple but when it comes to digitised work it is not that simple. This is so because the digitisation process is quite costly with technology equipment and skilled labour is concerned, therefore the institution needs funding either internationally or locally. When it is local funding there is not so much tension only that the funder will choose a specific collection that will be digitised. For example, a project that took place in 2010 at the Mayibuye archive when a former University of the Western Cape (UWC) student who works for the government ministry of arts, culture, sports and recreation. The student represented South Africa in playing chess and is linked to the sports section of the government, and wanted to know what sport was played on Robben Island.

The archivist showed the student the collection of 35 boxes of documentation of Robben Islands collection on sport and the first thing that came to the student’s mind is does the archive have it digitised or been thinking of doing digitisation and at the time the archive was thinking of it but were short on funding. The student then said ok if I make the equipment available, fund money and get three people in to do the digitisation would the archive agree with this proposal, and the archive agreed with this proposal. The digitisation therefore took two years where the whole collection is not yet completely digitised. The digitised occurred purely on the bases of the sports institution at UWC who choose the particular collection related to their department and the choice was not left in the hands of the archive but yet they

\textsuperscript{315} Respondent 3. Interview. 4 July 2014.

benefited from it; the digitising took place to avoid conflicts between the archive and the government.

During the apartheid period the issue of copyright was not even thought of, but once that period was over people wanted claim of copyright on photographs and many other historical documents, because they wanted to make a living out of it and wanted control over the documents, “still an on-going process cause these images, we do not know who owns, particularly when it comes to South African history”\textsuperscript{317}. At the Mayibuye archive students or communities that are not doing commercial projects certain archivists will let them use the documents without having to make payments for the copyrights, “it’s not going out there and besides its history, you know we help”, but when it comes to commercial ventures the archive charges these people for copyright.

The United States which large parts of the country’s economy is on the entertainment industry such as music, films and lots more. The people have huge issues about who the writer is, how you can use the stuff and if someone wants to use the material, “example in South Africa if I take that paper belongs to you and I take it and convert it even the converted paper which is the digital format still belongs to you but in the US for instance if I take that paper and digitize it, the digital format belongs to me so its copyright migration”\textsuperscript{318}. Therefore they have implemented laws to govern these issues, whereas South Africa is considered to have “wishy washy” laws, no fixed laws because there are no strong policies put into place, “it’s not fully developed, it is slowly”\textsuperscript{319} and “our policy is old so it was written before digitisation became a key issue”\textsuperscript{320}. The Mayibuye Archive got a bad reputation because they used to just send out material to people without consulting with the owner, “a lot of angry people saying how can you sell our pictures, we want the money”\textsuperscript{321}.

Unfortunately, the recorded material from the Robben Island Museum is not made available to the public because of issues that have developed regarding the use agreement that needs to be resolved between the Robben Island Museum and the ex-political prisoners. Although the material is made available for Robben Island Museum Staff that are doing Robben Island

\textsuperscript{317} Respondent 1. Interview. 10 June 2014.
\textsuperscript{318} Respondent 3. Interview. 4 July 2014.
\textsuperscript{319} Respondent 1. Interview. 10 June 2014.
\textsuperscript{320} Respondent 3. Interview. 4 July 2014.
\textsuperscript{321} Respondent 1. Interview. 10 June 2014.
Museum exhibitions but one cannot use it for personal assignments, unless there is an exception made or if you have permission.

With collections some owners might say there are no restrictions on their collections and other owners might place restrictions. The archive must know that they do not have autonomy over particular collections. When it comes to conservation purposes the archive has full autonomy over every collection there are no restrictions, “policies are by enlarged determine how you operate. If there is no copyright handed over the archive will not make it available.”

So the institution makes sure they have a digital copy of the collection in case of a disaster.

The complication with copyright laws is that it is not similar throughout the world. This is where the challenges come in that you get a group from the United States (US) and wants to digitise material for the archive and this might mean that the digitisation will be done under US copyright law. Therefore, the digitised copy belongs to the States and the analog belongs to the archive. This agrees with the argument of Limb that Africa will not be capable of controlling the nature of digitisation and the heritage resources that will be made available in their countries. What will be encountered here is that the archive that holds the analog material will not have access to its own material that is online because they do not own the digital format. The archive loses recognition for the collection and is denied access to the archives own material. Therefore international funding is very sceptical to proceed with in Africa especially where the funders exploit the archive for their own use, “Having digital archives onto the public domain has unfortunately resulted in the people in southern Africa are denied access to the digital archives of their own”.

## Conclusion

The policy is the base line for the process of digitisation to run smoothly. This was evident throughout my interviews and the arguments on digitisation. There is mention that the archive is revisiting the policy to incorporate digital preservation and to elaborate more on the digitisation process.

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Copyright was most evidently throughout all the arguments and was one of the main procedure focuses. This aspect in the policy falls down to the type of document being digitised and the information that will be made available in the public domain. In the case of conservation or preservation copyright issues are then not taken into account as it was evident in the interviews.

Another debate that sprung was access or accessibility of digital collections and was evident in the interviews. The evidence that really stood out and that is the ability to not gain access on the digital archive that has been done by an external company such as the US because of their copyright laws they own all the digital collections and the originals will be only accessed in Africa.

Skilled labour came out in one of the arguments and was evident in the interviews. There is very seldom that you find people who are driven to digitize and to perform the task effectively. People therefore need to be more engaged with digitisation since this is the way the archives are moving towards,

The development of a digitisation archive has altered the way in which the archive was previously created for researchers. For there will be no physical interaction of documents and the way in which the archive will be set up by servers and not by boxes of documentation. Although the original archive will still exist for the older generations who still want to visit the archive, but it will also be made available for the younger generation who want it digitised.
Bibliography


Respondent 1. Interview. 10 June 2014.
Respondent 2. Interview. 18 June 2014.
CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

South Africa has a long history of cartoons and comic strips, which some will argue, can be traced back to the Bushman rock art. Historians, Cartoonists and other academics have produced books and articles on this “multi-dimensional” (C. H. van Heerden 1994) art form, with emphasis on its historical value and its unique ability to provide, what Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes in the foreword to *Keeping a Sharp Eye: A Century of Cartoons on South Africa’s International Relations*, as “insight into issues that the rest of us find difficult, if not impossible, to comment on” (Foreword by Tutu in Vale (ed) 2001). Any collection of cartoons and comic strips from a specific time and place, tells the story of the human experience, attitudes, social conditions, political and economic situations of that slice in time. In South Africa, the qualities of communication that cartoons and comic strips hold become even more potent when considering our turbulent history in facing Apartheid, the resistance struggle and the transition to democracy.

In the report by the Arts and Culture Task Group, which was presented to the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology in June 1995, it states that the purpose of the new heritage policy in South Africa is to “affirm and promote the rich and diverse expression of South African Culture” (ACTAG report 1995), to ensure that all have access to resources and facilities for the production and appreciation of art and culture, in order that “past imbalances must be redressed” (ACTAG report 1995) and that ultimately pave the way for “national reconciliation in which all South Africans should have an equal share” (ACTAG report 1995). This is indeed a noble task which has been taken on by South Africa’s heritage workers. If heritage is the active conservation, presentation and interpretation of the past for present purposes, then my research would like to investigate if the conservation, presentation and interpretation of cartoons and comic strips, as well as their production, can contribute to a better understanding of our past and our present day existence in South Africa.
Literature review

I could not find literature which specifically relates to heritage and cartoons. The Literature I have used in my research for this paper has been sourced from different fields of study, but informs and relates to my question.

The first category of literature I have encountered are books compiled around editorial and political cartoons produced and published in South Africa’s newspapers and magazines starting from the early 19th century up until more recent times. These books take on historical, journalistic and political viewpoints in which the cartoons and comic strips included are chosen for their ability to depict a specific theme or period in South African.

*Keeping a Sharp Eye: A Century of Cartoons on South Africa’s International Relations* by Peter Vale (2011) focuses specifically on South Africa’s international relations in cartoons and comics. The book provides detailed descriptions and insights to the historical context and content of the cartoons.

*Penpricks: The Drawing of South Africa’s Political Battlelines* by Ken Vernon (2000), traces South Africa’s political landscape through editorial cartoons with the view that cartoons provide necessary comment on political issues and characters.

*Cartooning in Africa* has an article titled ‘African Cartooning: An Overview of Historical and Contemporary Issues’ by the editor John A. Lent (2009), in which he covers the situation of cartooning in a broad sense in Africa. He touches on issues like the birthplace of comics, ‘black’ identity, political and ‘freedom’ cartoons. Andy Mason’s article in the same book entitled ‘Ten Years After: South African Cartooning and the politics of Liberation’, also takes a historical outlook, but focuses more on the artists and their backgrounds, as well as topics like identity, the contradictions of liberalism, racial issues in cartoons and comics, resistance cartoons and how cartoons have been used for social change.

*What’s so Funny? –Under the Skin of South African Cartooning* by Andy Mason provides a journey through the history of cartooning in South Africa through the eyes of a cartoonist.

I have also looked at literature which focus on some of the artists themselves, and which examine what it is that makes cartoons and comic strips unique as an art form. An article entitled ‘Zapiro: The work of a Political Cartoonist in South Africa: Caricature, Complexity,
and Comedy in a Climate of Contestation’, written by Thomas A. Koelble and Steven L. Robins in the *Political Science and Politics* Journal (2007), and which includes an interview with the artist, looks at Zapiro’s depiction of President Zuma and the ANC in his cartoons and what his standpoints and attitudes are.

C. H. van Heerden writes for *Communicare - Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa* in his article, ‘Newspaper Cartoons as a Reflection of Political Change during the first Democratic Elections in South Africa’ (1994), in which he analyses Newspaper cartoons and their ability to indicate political change, their forms of communication and ability for social commentary.

Other literature was sourced from fields like Cultural Studies, and Heritage Studies in South Africa and Africa in order to place cartooning within this framework.

**Theoretical framework**

In her article, ‘Cultural Reconstruction in the New South Africa’, Karin Barber writes, “It is through expressive forms that the political revolution can most immediately be lived out in reconciliation, in refashioning of personal and collective identities, and in the rediscovery of a common humanity” (Barber 2000). South Africa has come out of a past filled with oppression, violence and struggle, to a state of liberation and democracy. During the fight against Apartheid, “cultural forms were recognised as weapons or sites of resistance” (Barber 2000) and our history of cartoons and comic strips shows how this art form played its role in the resistance.

Yet after 20 years of democracy, South Africans face a different set of realities which range from crime, unemployment, energy shortages and insufficient housing, to xenophobia, globalization and mass consumer culture.

My research into cartooning and comics will therefore investigate this graphic narrative form through the lens of African Studies, Cultural Studies and Heritage Studies, in order to examine the ‘powers’ of comics and cartoons for heritage production and interpretation.
CHAPTER TWO: HISTORY AND CARTOONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

History in cartoons

Cartooning and caricature is an ancient art form which has been linked to ancient Egypt and even South Africa’s Bushman paintings, but the cartoons we know today really had their beginnings alongside the invention of printing in the seventeenth century in Holland. This paper is however not about the history of cartoons or even about the history of cartoons in South Africa. South Africa does have an amazingly rich cartoon history which has unfortunately not received much attention. If it were not for the revelation and hard work of a handful of dedicated authors, I might have had nothing to work from.

Four books helped me gain a better understanding of the way that cartoons express history. These books are *Keeping a Sharp Eye: A Century of Cartoons on South Africa’s International Relations* by Peter Vale (2011), *Penpricks: The Drawing of South Africa’s Political Battlelines* by Ken Vernon (2000), *What’s so Funny – Under the Skin of South African Society* by Andy Mason (2010) and *Cartooning in Africa* by J. A. Lent (2009). Although they are all different in their approach to cartoons and history they seem to all agree that there is something unique about the kind of history that cartoons tell.

In the preface to his book entitled *What’s So Funny – Under the Skin of South African Society*, Andy Mason continuously remarks and acknowledges the fact that in the process of putting the book together, he found himself trespassing on the territory of the professional historian. This is because cartoons and comics naturally link themselves to history. Cartoons embody a kind of storytelling of the events and experiences of a society, of a people of a specific time and place.

David Keane notes how Spielmann, the historian of Punch, emphasized the significance of the cartoon in understanding history. Spielmann stated that the cartoons should “not to be considered merely as a comic or satirical comment on the main occurrence or situation of the week, but as contemporary history for the use and information of future generations cast into amusing form for the entertainment of the present” (Spielmann in Keane 2008).

Cartoons and comic strips then, are not only a form of history, but illustrates history in a unique manner, as if thru the ‘eyes’ of the contemporary ‘everyday’ so intimately tied to the conditions, experiences and concerns of the times.
CHAPTER THREE: RACE, STEREOTYPES AND IDENTITY

American cartoonist, editor, and comics advocate, Art Spiegelman, admits that cartoons have a “predisposition toward insult” and caricature is by definition “a charged or loaded image” (Spiegelman 2006). He notes the following in an article for the June 2006 Harper’s Magazine entitled ‘Drawing Blood – Outrageous cartoons and the art of outrage’:

“Cartoon language is mostly limited to deploying a handful of recognizable visual symbols and clichés. It makes use of the discredited pseudoscientific principles of physiognomy to portray character through a few physical attributes and facial expressions. It takes skill to use such clichés in ways that expand or subvert this impoverished vocabulary.” (Spiegelman 2006)

Cartoons often make use of stereotypes and have many times in the past been used to portray racial prejudice. It is interesting to discover that, if you look into the history of cartooning, you find that it is not just African people or non-European people who have been treated with racial prejudice in cartoons. In the nineteenth century, for example, Irish people were portrayed as “subhuman Celtic gorillas” (Appel in Keane 2008) in English cartoons. The American political cartoonist Thomas Nast created a cartoon in 1867 around the theme of St. Patrick’s Day showing “ape-faced Irish thugs brutally clubbing New York’s finest” (Appel in Keane 2008). However, within the space of about forty years things had transformed to where in 1904, the St. Patrick’s Day cartoon depicted St. Patrick as a whimsical leprechaun, a friendly, pixie-like creature” (Appel in Keane 2008).

A seminar entitled Cartooning for Peace: The Responsibility of Political Cartoonists was organized by the UN in October 2006. The UN held a number of these seminars since this first one, as well as a special edition seminar entitled Cartooning for Human Rights, to coincide with Human Rights Day, held in Rome from 10 to 12 December 2007. At the very first seminar, former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, noted that cartoons "have a special role in forming public opinion-because an image generally has a stronger, more direct impact on the brain than a sentence does". He also emphasized that "few things can hurt you more directly than a caricature of yourself, of a group you belong to, or perhaps worst of all, a person you deeply respect"(Keane 2008). Annan, who maintained that cartoonists should not be censored, also urged cartoonists to take responsibility for what they created as “cartoons can offend” and therefore cartoonists should “use their influence, not to reinforce stereotypes or inflame passions, but to promote peace and understanding” (Keane 2008). It was insisted
that cartoonists need to be able to work without threat and be able to express their viewpoints, as long as they remain within the parameters of the law. They should exercise restraint and consideration even though, in Keane’s opinion, these traits do not blend so easily with the profession.

If a study were to be done on racial stereotyping and prejudice in cartoons and comics all over the world throughout history, we would find that prejudice exists among all people and this could teach us to look at ourselves and be more aware of our own prejudices. But, it could also develop a sense of hope as we witness how things can slowly improve over time and that people can develop understanding towards each other. Since cartoons also have the ability to formulate identities through the creation of characters and personalities. Readers learn to identify, relate or differentiate themselves according to race, class and beliefs for example. Cartoons can therefore teach us about these identities as well as affect identities.
CHAPTER FOUR: COMMUNICATION IN CARTOONS

The mechanism of satirical/political cartoons

In order to understand the way that cartoons communicate information and ideas and to understand how these are able to impact the reader or viewer, we turn to Suniti Bal’s article for the *Journal of Public Affairs* (2009) in which she describes a theory for how satirical/political cartoons affect people’s perceptions and opinions. Although her theory comes from a marketing perspective and the analyses is used to explain specifically political cartoons and therefore political branding and image, it could be argued that all cartoons or comic strips make use of the same mechanism. This mechanism is what creates, in Suniti Bal’s words, “an emotive response in the audience” and therefore also “making it an effective tool of dissent” (Suniti Bal 2009).

According to Suniti Bal, for a cartoon to work or be successful, three necessary conditions need to be present. Drawn from literature of satire and caricature, she identifies these three conditions as “sympathy, gap and differentiation” (Suniti Bal 2009). ‘Sympathy’ refers to the audience’s ability to relate to or identify with the object of the cartoon. This necessary condition ensures that the reader or viewer becomes in a way bonded with the object through some form of understanding based on feelings. ‘Gap’ relates to some form of perceived distinction or separation being made between the image and reality. And the third necessary condition, ‘Differentiation’, refers to the object being differentiated or being distinct from other objects within the specific context. Suniti Bal describes two components of differentiation, one being physical and the other ideological. Physical differentiation refers to visual traits such as colour, size and shape, or to physical abilities such as strength or speed (Suniti Bal 2009). Beliefs and ideals or intangible abilities such as intelligence and wisdom, make up the ideological differentiation component.

In caricature and cartoons, it is then that the exaggeration of that which differentiates the object, which could be physical and/or ideological, reveals a gap between image and reality, while maintaining sympathy. This is then mechanism of a successful caricature or cartoon as described by Suniti Bal.
In the article, Suniti Bal uses a political cartoon (see Figure) by cartoonist Zapiro to illustrate this mechanism. The cartoon appeared in the Sunday Times on 8 September 2009. The reader of the cartoon is able to relate and feel for the lady (representing the justice system) who is being held down by Zuma’s supporters. She is powerless as Zuma prepares to rape her. The image plays on the concept of oppressor and the oppressed and this is very emotive. The ‘Gap’ between reality and the image is created by the metaphor of representing the justice system in the form of a human. The reality is that Zuma had real rape allegations charged against him and that the ANC, ANC Youth League, Cosatu and SACP allowed him to do as he pleased. The ‘Differentiation’ was achieved here not through exaggeration of any physical features, but rather that of difference of ideology. The shower on Zuma’s head becomes a symbol of his ‘uniqueness’ and his position in the image standing above the crouching leaders, differentiates him from the rest.

Fig.1  Zuma cartoon by Zapiro which appeared in the Sunday Times

The realm of thoughts and ideas

In 1998 an article entitled ‘Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art’ by Alan D. Manning, Associate Professor in the Department of Linguistics at Brigham Young University, was published in All Faculty Publications. In it, Manning uses the theory of author Scott McCloud in describing the psychological functioning of cartoons.
Manning starts out by explaining the distinctions in semiotics between “icons” (visual forms of resemblance, e.g., photos or sketches), “indices” (pointing signals, e.g., smoke pointing to fire or a mercury level in a thermometer indicating temperature) and “symbols” (forms with meanings learned only by habitual use, e.g., a cross on a church, the letter A, a word or a wink)” (Manning 1998). Diagrams and cartoons are considered “iconic legisigns” (Manning 1998) which is a type of ‘icon’. They are neither abstracted forms, which do not resemble anything, nor are they realistic in their resemblance of things. They are somewhere in between, being able to resemble something real in an abstracted manner. Manning explains McCloud’s theory that cartoons, diagrams or sketches have a unique “psychological impact” (Manning 1998). As they strip down or simplify, they are also amplifying meaning and create focus. They convey ideas and concepts better than photographs or objects because they are closer to language and symbols.

“Since cartoons already exist as concepts for the reader, they tend to flow easily through the conceptual territory between panels...But realistic images have a bumpier ride. Theirs is a primarily visual existence which doesn’t pass easily into the realm of ideas” (C.S. Peirce in Manning 1998)

Cartoons present a “way of seeing” (Manning 1998) and are therefore the “ideal medium for new ideas, new ways of seeing” (Manning 1998). At the end of the article, Manning urges professionals to make use of cartoons and line sketches as a form of communication and instruction, seeing them as “essential tools” (Manning 1998) in this business.

With their unique ability to act as tools of communication, instruction and the conveying or even formulation of new ideas, cartoons therefore could be very useful in the fields of heritage and museum work.
Resistance

In June 2006, a number of cartoons became the centre of a controversy that resulted in the death of 6 people at the Danish embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, in June 2008. The Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, had published cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad. The events surrounding these cartoons drew the world’s attention to the issues of freedom of expression.

Cartoonist, among others like stand-up comedians or satirical playwrights, can say things that other people or printed medium cannot say. The cartoon as a medium thrives in a free and democratic society.

Cartoons have often and also with great effect been used as a weapon to aid resistance movements around the world. It does this through propaganda and employing its specific mechanisms which is discussed later in the paper (Refer to Chapter 5). Many cartoonists have also found themselves in exile or having to be held under protection because of threats made to their lives.

In South Africa, throughout the struggle, cultural forms were recognised and employed as weapons and instruments of resistance. The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) often used graphic propaganda during the liberation struggle. They also made use of cartoons which were published in their official newspaper Umsebenzi / South African Worker. As Deirdre Pretorius notes, these cartoons have not received critical attention and so in her article for Image & Text (2007), she examines just a selection of these cartoons from the CPSA’s anti-pass laws campaign for the years 1933 to 1936. The article specifically focuses on how the pass system actually created class structures amongst Africans, as well as constructed racial and gender identities at the time, and how the cartoons acted as resistance to it.
CHAPTER FIVE: CULTURE AND SOUTH AFRICA

Culture in South Africa

South Africa, having come out of a violent struggle for democracy, is now experiencing what Karin Barber describes as “a rapid, uneven process of political liberalization and cultural reinvention” which promotes “transformations of outlook and behaviour” (Barber 2000). There is also specifically transformation of identity and self-representation. These changes and developments in South Africa’s cultural landscape are key to the creation of a new South Africa. But there are other changes taking place in the everyday lives of ordinary South Africans which affect South African society and the way that we express ourselves. The country as opened itself up to international business, to global communication and information systems, mass consumer culture and tourism. On top of all this South Africans also face other realities such escalating crime and corruption, unemployment, energy shortages, rising food costs, insufficient housing, a struggling education system and xenophobia.

The enemy to our hopes for a better future as South African’s is no longer an “easily identifiable political hierarchy” (Barber 2000), but rather the complexities of these ground level concerns. It is in times like these that ‘ordinary’ experience comes to the fore, “areas of ambiguity, of the personal, of pleasure” (Baber 2000). It is also an opportunity for developing new perspectives on contemporary South African culture that encapsulates a fuller understanding of our past, our connections to the rest of Africa and the world, and the long denied histories of the connections and intimacies between our own racial and class structures.

From a cultural studies point of view, the study of popular cultural forms, alongside the more prestigious forms, allows for an inclusive study that enables the rethinking of what it means to be a South African today.

“A critical reader of culture should… prick up her ears when a text, idea, or practice is habitually and as a matter of course dismissed as silly, uninteresting, or passé; for it is in the fertile loam of marginal that we may find the structure of power revealed in particularly fascinating ways” (Rita Barnard in Barber 2000)
Cartoons and exhibitions

There are many examples of cartoons being exhibited as artefacts of art and history. This includes the exhibitions displayed at cartoon museums like the International Museum of Cartoon Art in Florida USA and the British Cartoon Museum in London. These museums collect, preserve and exhibit cartoons and comic art as cultural objects which “reflect the ideas and attitudes of the society that produced them” (Charla 1998). They are active in promoting cartoons and comics so that people see them as more than just entertainment or illustrations, but as valuable contributions to the fabric of society.

Exhibitions which display the work of specific artists or shows curated around themes using cartoon art are popular. An example of this is the Cartoons in Context exhibition which was exhibited at Museum Africa in Newton, Gauteng in 2011. Linda Chernis, the exhibition’s curator, selected political and satirical cartoons from the museum’s collection, some dating back to as far as the late 1700’s all the way through to contemporary times. The viewer is taken on a chronological journey, with the cartoons covering all the major “social, political and recreational moments in South Africa’s history” (Bothma 2011) and makes use of works by well-known South African cartoonists such as Abe Berry and Zapiro.

More difficult to find, are examples of museums using the cartoon or comic as the medium or means to tell the story or present the information it wishes to communicate to the viewer or visitor, examples where cartoons are created specifically for an exhibition. Throughout my course this year I have come across two such exhibitions. One is the soccer exhibition entitled Offside: Kick Ignorance Out, Football Unites & Racism Divides exhibited at the Homecoming Centre of the District Six Museum in 2010 and the other is the cartoon made by Bitterkomix for the Familieverhalen/Family Stories exhibition.

In October 2002 the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam presented an exhibition called Group Portrait South Africa: Nine Family Histories. The curator, Paul Faber, selected nine families from South Africa and exhibited their personal family histories through the use of personal objects, photographs and specially made artworks by well-known South African artists. The artworks were to act as interpretations which “reach[ed] certain fields and depths that could not otherwise be accessed (Faber 2007). He also wanted the artworks to represent the different approaches and styles of contemporary art in South Africa, a mix from both the ‘high’ art and ‘low’ art categories. The Bitterkomix team, Conrad Botes and Anton Kannemeyer, were asked by the curator to produce a comic which focused on one of the
families of the exhibition as he felt that “[c]omics are obviously a very suitable medium for telling stories” (Faber 2007). The drawings produced showed the Le Feur family history story with an “epic effect” (Faber 2007) and took on the unique perspective of the artists.

I could unfortunately not find any pictures or photographs of the Bitterkomix artwork in order to analyse it more closely, but for the purposes of this paper it sufficient to note that the curator commissioned the artists to produce the work around a specific story, although it seems that they were also allowed freedom to interpret it in their own fashion. Faber writes that he was quiet keen to work with them and saw them as “free and independent spirits with a fresh and critical approach” (Faber 2007).

In time for the 2010 Soccer World Cup finals, the District Six Museum in collaboration with the British Council; Football Unites, Racism Divides (FURD) and Kick It Out, put on an exhibition entitled Offside: Kick Ignorance Out, Football Unites & Racism Divides. The exhibition focused attention on the footballing connections between South Africa and the United Kingdom starting back in the 19th century all the way to the present. The exhibition celebrated the achievements of South African footballers who had worked in both Britain and South Africa, but also specifically highlighted their personal experiences of racism and discrimination, an issue which remains a problem in the sport.

The entire exhibition took on a graphic and comic-book styled presentation which is described as a ‘nostalgia trip’ on the FURD website, and although it was targeted at young people, it also appealed to a wide audience. The exhibition was divided into two sections. The first section displayed a cartoon that was published in 1899 in an English newspaper, about the first African football team to tour Britain and shows how they were ridiculed on racial and prejudiced terms. There was also a comic-book style image of the Ghanaian-born footballer named Arthur Wharton, depicting him as “hanging ape-like form a crossbar” (Alegi 2011). The text which accompanies this image explains how Wharton was often compared to a monkey. In the same section of the exhibition, there stood very large display resembling a comic-book centrefold (as seen in Fig.). This cartoon produced for this display told the story of “Bongani”, a fictional character who is a player from South Africa. In the cartoon, Bongani overcomes difficulties in his life, becomes a professional football player in Europe and in the end returns to South Africa to coach other young aspiring boys in the community. Although this is a very simple story it is meant to be educational and provide a positive message for young visitors. The exhibition also had a number of life-size cartoon
styled representations or suspended figures of South African players with narrations and text about their lives and experiences.

Fig.2 Visitors in front of the giant comic-book centrefold display


The way that the exhibition is described by Peter Alegi in his 2011 review in The Public Historian, and from the photographs I could find on the internet, there appears to be spaces in the exhibition where the visitors seems to be inside and part of a life-size cartoon and the exhibition text actually acts as the text boxes and speech bubbles of cartoons (Fig. and Fig.) This adds another visual and conceptual layer to the exhibition.

Judging by the reviews of this exhibition, it was very successful. It spoke directly to youth, but managed to also reach older audiences. The messages carried by the cartoon styled representations combined with the text and other features of the display were clear and interactive. It is a good example of how an exhibition can play to the strengths of the cartoon or comic as a means of communication and interpretation.
Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 sourced from the District Six Museum’s website (www.districtsix.co.za) on 25 October 2015
The post-colonial, power and resistance

Political cartoons can be an indication of the state of a country’s democratic well-being as they show the “government’s tolerance of free speech and critical thought, and of resistance to dominant power relations” (Hammett 2010).

The study of political cartoons and other graphic narrative forms, therefore presents an opportunity to engage with the “complex, dynamic and incomplete relations of power and resistance” (Hammett 2010) which are the concerns of post-colonial society. This is because they are spaces where the reader can laugh at themselves, ridicule the powerful, reflect on and acknowledge the downfalls of the state and society as a whole, but most importantly these spaces spark the recognition, even if just for a moment, of their own agency. The cartoon or comic strip is a place where the ‘powerful’ are challenged and questioned and where thoughts about the relations between power and resistance is opened up.

Through the study of cartoons and comics, one is not just able to investigate specific topics, events or people, but it is also a platform through which to engage with much broader theoretical debates. The research into and the teaching of these image/text’s enable a study of the post-colonial condition through the questioning and interrogation of “power, representation, and resistance” (Hammett 2010) in diverse ways. As Hammett states, the “consideration of a canon of political cartoons can reveal a more detailed, nuanced narrative regarding engagements with changing social, economic and political conditions in the post-colony” (Hammett 2010). Cartoons and satire therefore provide a narrative, commentary and an insight on the “processes of democratisation and social change” (Hammett 2010) experienced in the post-colony.

The complexities of power and resistance are found in social relations and everyday life. Power is not one directional, but exists in the different relations within society and in everyday life. Thus power is not just the power over, but is also the power to resist and oppose, and the power to represent one’s self.

Because cartoons often comment on and critique dominant power relations, they become powerful as spaces of negotiation of power and resistance, within the African continent and beyond. The media in post-colonial societies often promote a very specific image of the nation or political status which does not encourage critical citizenship. Through the use of
satire and caricature, cartoons can be seen as the counter-narratives to these sometimes overpowering narratives of governments or other elites.

Cartoons function on so many planes in society. They provide a space for a form of public commentary on the process of democratisation and the changes experienced by a society. They allow for the expression of underlying concerns and reflect the power relations which exist between the state and society, as well as within society. Yet, to this day, they remain largely under-utilized and under-valued as a tool or resource for research and teaching.
CHAPTER SIX: INTERNSHIP

My internship at the Mayibuye Archives Art Collection was supervised by Hamilton Budaza. The Archive holds the Abe Berry Cartoon Collection and it was this collection that I worked with during my time there. The collection consists of over 10 000 original works and about 7000 newspaper clippings, and other personal object like books and photographs.

During my time there I was shown the correct manner to handle the artworks and other objects. This involved wearing gloves at all times, using newsprint on the table where I worked and handling with care. As I worked my way through each folder or file I was introduced to the cataloguing system and the numbering of each artefact. I also checked that all the items which were meant to be together were together and that they were in numerical order. Folders and files were also signed in and out as I made use of them.

Some of the issues I discovered were that the facility was not ideal for the proper conservation of the collection, because the space is quite limited. Also the staff is required to do all the cleaning themselves along with their other work which can be a bit difficult.

I however found my time at the archive to be a very enriching experience. The Abe Berry collection had probably not received much attention since it has been kept at the archive, but what I have learnt is that a collection of a cartoonist’s work and personal objects like this one can provide very unique insight into the artist and the time period he lived. Firstly, the original artworks are very valuable at least to an aspiring cartoonist. One witnesses his growth and development as an artist, the way that he selects topics and his approach to his work. There are even originals where the newspaper editor has made comments as to what to change and remove. The collection of cartoons speaks about the times within which they were created. The artist has depicted his characters, scenarios, events and locations with his unique expressive style and view of society.
CHAPTER SEVEN: HERITAGE

Heritage question

Heritage seems to be a very difficult concept to define. David C. Harvey quoted Johnson & Thomas in his article as simply pointing out that heritage is “virtually anything by which some kind of link, however tenuous or false, may be forged with the past” (Johnson & Thomas in Harvey 2001). But this is a very broad definition and makes it difficult for me to consider whether cartoons and comics should be considered heritage. For the purposes of this paper it is necessary to have some kind of ‘heritage criteria’ to compare cartoons and comics with.

In our course material this year for the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies course we were given articles by six authors around the question of the meaning of heritage today and looking at how heritage is produced. I have drawn on these articles by D. C. Harvey, G. Abungu, J. E. Tunbridge, G. J. Ashworth, J. McGregor and L. Schumaker to draw up a heritage concept with its own ‘heritage criteria’ which I feel relates to cartoons.

From these articles the following ‘criteria’ stand out in relation to cartoons:

- Heritage is concerned with history or the past in some way
- Heritage can often be linked to the people, the ‘everyday’ and the ‘ordinary’
- Heritage often engages with the “production of identity, power and authority” (Harvey 2001)
- Heritage is linked to a people’s or nations resources which could be cultural and related to arts and crafts
- Heritage is a process which conserves, presents and interprets material for present purposes to be passed on to future generations
7.2 CONCLUSION

To answer the question whether cartoons are heritage might be a little bit too big for a small research paper such as this one, but what I have discovered is that cartoons lend themselves very well to the concerns of heritage and heritage work.

Cartoons illustrate a unique form of history which is connected to society and the everyday. It speaks about identities and can be involved in creating new personal and collective identities in a post-colonial society like South Africa. It is space of new thought and new ideas and encourages freedom of expression and resistance to power. This relates to the work of the more community minded heritage projects as it can help in teaching and negotiating critical citizenship in the new South Africa.

Perhaps cartoons just needs more people to see and it as the valuable resource it is and choose it as material for conservation, presentation and interpretation.
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MATERIAL CULTURE OBJECTS OF POLITICAL IMPRISONMENT:
INTERPRETATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF ROBBEN ISLAND MUSEUM

BY

EPHRAIM MWAITA

ABSTRACT
The research seeks to narrate the brutality and inhumane of apartheid political imprisonment period on Robben Island through the use of material culture objects. The brutality of political imprisonment is currently being narrated based on oral histories and memory of former political prisoners with much emphasis on the triumph from the brutality and how political prisoners managed to endure inhumane conditions in the prison. Little is being done to engage the horrors and brutality of imprisonment on Robben Island in the interpretation through the use of movable objects. Museums are known worldwide in educating or tell its stories to the public through its objects, it creates and provides the platform for objects to tell their own stories. It is in this case that the research observed that the current interpretation of apartheid political imprisonment on Robben Island is not complete. Considering the fact that oral histories and memory tends to change with time and space, easy to be distorted in future, this can lead to bias and inaccurate future interpretations of the brutality of apartheid political imprisonment period on Robben Island. The research therefore, intends to attach these oral histories and memories on movable material culture objects of Robben Island Museum which depicts the brutality of imprisonment period and wish for their inclusion in the interpretation of the Museum.
INTRODUCTION

Background of the research

Robben Island was declared a National Museum in 1996 and a World Heritage Site in 1999. It is a living Museum with the vision of making sure that the history of Robben Island is remembered and promoted as well as its unique symbol of “triumph of the human spirit over hardship and injustice” (ICMP, 2007 – 2012). According to Riouful, (2000: 141-147), and in support of ex-political prisoners the Museum is also a site representing peace and reconciliation. In my view the Island is an inspiration of hope to those who face suppression, discrimination and torture in all its forms and this is evidenced by its immovable cultural landscape, its buildings, sites, movable objects and graves.

Although Robben Island Museum’s status as a World Heritage Site derives from a far longer history, it is most popularly known as a prison during the apartheid era. South Africa witnessed segregation and discrimination and suffered its darkest period ever during apartheid rule, from 1948 to 1994. The then government passed discriminatory laws to control every aspect of black people’s lives, laws about where people could live, work, trade, go to school, the type of education they could receive and the government took extreme measures to crunch resistance to these laws. People who were fighting for justice and freedom against these laws were arrested and incarcerated at Robben Island while others went into hiding and exile.

Research problem

Much of the interpretations on Robben Island which pay particular attention on the brutality and cruel treatment are based on oral histories and memories from former political prisoners who are working in the Museum. Considering the fact that oral histories and memory tends to change with time and space, this have a negative effect in the future and pose a threat to future generations in gaining rich and correct knowledge on apartheid political imprisonment on Robben Island as oral histories and memory can be easily tempered with. The current Robben Island Museum interpretation puts much emphasis on the “Triumphalism’ narrative being represented by the image of the liberation icon, the first black South African president Nelson Mandela. There is no direct physical confrontation of the cruelty and inhumane of apartheid political imprisonment through the use of objects.
Noel Solani and Veronique Riouful concur on the current reshaping of Robben Island Museum’s representations as dominated by influential memory-makers. Solani explained further in detail stating that the Museum perpetuates the Mandela myth, despite the house of Robert Sobukwe (the founding president of the Pan African Congress, PAC) in the prison yard, much of the attention is on Nelson Mandela, his cell, his labour on the lime quarry, and the courtyard. I also concur with Solani, (2000), during the guided tour visitors are not taken to the Blue Stone Quarry where the majority of prisoners worked during the 1960s. The stone that built the present maximum-security prison was mined and crafted in that stone quarry. In order to mine the stone, prisoners did not use modern machinery; they utilized picks, hammers, spades, ropes and wheelbarrows to fulfil their tasks.

The traditional role of Museums is to collect objects and materials of cultural, religious, political and historical importance, preserve them, research into them and present them to the public for the purpose of education and enjoyment. Robben Island Museum is in custody of permanent historical artefacts that were left on the Island by the prison authorities such as prison clothing, workshop tools, sporting kits and furniture, prison registers, a music collection of LP records. Paper based material and music collections have been moved to the University of the Western Cape-Mayibuye Archives (ICMP, 2007 – 2012), while the remaining artefacts are locked in the prison storeroom on the Island and in the storeroom at the centre for performing arts studio at the University of the Western Cape. To this effect none of the objects which narrate the inhumane of political imprisonment on the Island has been exhibited to the public.

**Literature review**

Before 1970 most prisoners were sentenced to hard labour working in either the stone or lime quarries, collecting seaweed in the ice-cold sea, other prisoners sat in arranged groups to break the rock pieces into smaller pieces, failure to fulfil the quota was punishable and various other works such as building roads, clearing fields and chopping wood. Besides hard labour prisoners were also assaulted, beaten with ‘baton sticks’, racism in the prison, black prisoners were treated very brutal than Coloured or Asian prisoners, the food and clothes they receive was different. However, organization, discipline and courage of political prisoners keep them alive, they organised themselves to fight back the brutality and harsh conditions
they were suffering in the prison through the establishment of committees such as disciplinary, educational, political and recreational (Hutton, 2000:55).

South African Museums Association (SAMA, 2001) define museums as dynamic and accountable public institutions which both shape and manifest the consciousness, identities and understanding of communities and individuals in relation to their natural, historical and cultural environments, through collection, documentation, conservation, research and education programmes that are responsive to the needs of society.

A museum object tells a story through its physical structure and its associations, it is this which determines the value of an object in to the museum. According to ICOM, ICCROM, AFRICOM, SAMA core functions of museums includes research, this relates to the study of collections in order to generate knowledge and repacking of existing information and data in ways that make people think, appreciate and communicate, this relates to the creation of relationships between people and museum objects either through exhibitions, public events, educational programmes, pamphlets, social media, publications, newspaper or magazine articles in a way that people participate and respond.

Hoskins, (2005), argues that the analysis of material culture objects can interpret human activities in relation to their environment since these materials are culturally made by humans to serve humans. Objects are agents specifically made for a purpose to foster the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Samuel and Alberti, (2005: 32-35) also argues that objects act as primary sources. Therefore, objects can be used as the evidence in the study of past events. Gell, (1998), formulates a theory about the creation of objects that could in fact be a theory about the creation of all forms of material culture objects. He asserts that things are made as a form of instrumental action, objects are produced in order to influence the thoughts and actions of others.
CHAPTER 1

In the making of Robben Island as a museum, it faced two diverse narratives to interpret it to the public. Rioufol (1999:141-142) classified these narratives as the apartheid narrative and the liberation movement narrative. The apartheid narrative she referred to as the period of imprisonment life, the horrors and harsh conditions of the period whilst the liberation movement she referred to the triumph of overcoming the hardships, the discipline and the dignity of prisoners. Debates took place as a way of constructing the interpretation of Robben Island to the public and the need for a conciliatory narrative was raised and adopted. The Heritage Site became to be regarded as ‘the birth of a new and democratic South Africa’ and the liberation movement narrative was adopted to interpret the site as “The triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil, a triumph of wisdom and largeness of spirit against small minds and pettiness; a triumph of courage and determination over frailty and weakness” (ICMP, 2007-2012).

This narrative was drawn at the same time South Africa was embarking on the reconciliation strategy, during the political transition from apartheid to a ‘new’ free and democratic society in which Nelson Mandela became the influential figure and the symbol for the transition. Reconciliation, peace and democracy were preached across the country under the influence of key political figures, former political prisoners. Nesje (2005:43-48) argued that the interpretation of Robben Island was highly politicized. I concur with her in the sense that the key and most influential figure in the making of Robben Island a museum, Ahmed Kathrada, was the personal advisor to Nelson Mandela, the brains behind reconciliation in the new democratic South Africa. I think because of that to focus on the horrors and the inhumane of the period in the interpretation of Robben Island can be regarded as a stumbling block in obtaining reconciliation, peace and democratic South Africa, therefore, there was the need of a positive message. Today Robben Island is being interpreted as the Site for the triumph of human spirit through the symbolism and much emphasis on Nelson Mandela across the prison in which Solani argued as the ‘Mandela Myth’ (Solani, 2000). However, it can be argued that the current interpretation of Robben Island is not the complete story rather it can be argued to serve other interests at the expense of other events represented by the site.

Robben Island period of 1962 to late 1970s has been extensively documented, more particularly by certain International organizations. Evidence on the conditions and treatment
of political prisoners at Robben Island during this period was given to the United Nations Commission for Human Rights and the special Political Committee on apartheid (Nevile, 2013 and ICRC, 2009). In South Africa Mayibuye archives is one of the Institutions with rich literature and oral histories of the inhumane of apartheid political imprisonment. Neville (2013:21) described Robben Island as a “microcosm of apartheid violence and injustice” and Odendaal described it as “a unique place in the South African history…… it reflected in microcosm the violence of apartheid on the other hand and on the other the courage, the vision and the humanity of those opposing it, and of the oppressed generally”. Although ex-political prisoners are tour guides on the Island and they can share their experiences during their time of imprisonment that alone is not enough without the physical evidence of movable objects which support those oral histories and memories.

Deacon (1996) argued that the ‘triumph’ narrative was chosen in order to shift away from the evil and horrors of apartheid so that it won’t invoke or offend people and to foster peace and reconciliation in the country. Museum as a discipline is undergoing rapid transformations, it is now a place for the production of knowledge, site of public culture, objects being used to generate knowledge, knowledge for the purposes of education and invoke memories in a positive manner for the development of human society. One such example of invoking memory in a positive manner is by exhibiting the horrors and harsh conditions of apartheid imprisonment in a way not to offend anyone but rather making the viewer to feel as if she/he is a prisoner, to create an environment that everyone can have a feeling to feel that such kind of acts should not happen again in future.

A lot has been done in narrating the triumph of human spirit over brutality and hardships through exhibitions. ‘Esiqithini’ exhibition in 1993 which was redisplayed in 1996 and changed its name to Robben Island Gateway project focuses on the prisoner’s resistance and resourcefulness, how they struggled to freedom, attempted to escape, how they arrange themselves in fighting for the improvement of conditions in the prison, how they were receiving messages of sympathy and admiration from International and National anti-apartheid groups (Minkley et al, 1996). Cell Stories exhibition narrated how prisoners adapted and endured to the brutality and harsh conditions in the prison by mainly turning the prison in to a ‘University’ set up, an exhibition focusing on individual achievements. “Journeys of Sorrow and Hope” is another exhibition displayed at Jetty 1, the exhibition explains the place as the embarkation point to and from the Island by political prisoners,
visitors and warders. The exhibition is comprised of letters from family members, church groups, social services organizations, and legal personnel’s seeking permission to visit political prisoners.

I think these exhibitions focused much on the triumphalism narrative and some of the attempts to narrate the brutal and cruel treatment of apartheid political imprisonment was done in a positive manner, with little critical direct confrontation of the harshness and inhumane of political imprisonment on Robben Island. In my view did every political prisoner achieved something as a result of imprisonment? Are there not any prisoners who suffered to the extent of their health being affected or face death as a result of brutality? I think the political stanza of reconciliation affected the complete representation of Robben Island as a museum to the public in that it down plays other memories of the reality of the inhumane of apartheid political imprisonment as well its legacy in the present and future generations.

According to Robben Island Museum Integrated Conservation Management Plan (ICMP) of 2013 – 2018, movable material culture objects are not being given place in telling Robben Island story of political imprisonment. The management plan argues that the first ICMP Interpretation Plan was not properly implemented, possibly because it was considered too complex and, therefore, difficult to implement. On a practical level the relationship between the tangible and intangible heritage was not created, leading to ineffective communication of the core value of the Island. However, the relationship between tangible and intangible is the attachment of memories on objects and let objects speak for themselves. Objects are physical tangible representations of intangible oral histories and memories.
CHAPTER 2

Robben Island Museum pays insufficient attention in attaching its rich oral histories and memory of the brutality of apartheid political imprisonment to its material collections that speaks to the isolation, torture and hardships of imprisonment period on the Island. The Museum is in custody of objects which includes wheel barrows, shovels, hammers, chisels, picks, axes, spades, Mary, canes, baton sticks, hand cuffs, leg irons, prison clothes, prison cutlery, plates, cups, censored letters. These objects are not on exhibition. These objects serve as the tangible evidence of the memories of the inhumane of apartheid political imprisonment on Robben Island.

![Shovel, hammer, pick. (Robben Island Museum collections)](image)

Wheel barrow, shovel, pick, hammer carry histories and evidence of hard labour during political imprisonment on the Island. By looking at these objects alone one can see the essence of work, but on Robben Island the work was inhumane. Hutton (1997: 57) quotes Michael Dingake a former political prisoner explaining his experience of hard labour on stone quarry during imprisonment “It was hard work at the stone quarry, compressor drills vibrated the whole day, shaking their operators like reeds in the wind. Some prisoners wielded huge hammers and pounded metal pins with all their might to split huge rocks embedded below sea level. The bulk of prisoners sat in arranged groups to break the rock pieces into smaller pieces, failure to fulfil the quota was punishable. The rest of the work span carted the crushed stones around in wheelbarrows. Blisters and callused hands were the hallmarks of quarry span prisoners.” Indres Naidoo in Sachs (1982: 76) also points out that
“Our arms ached. Our hands were blistered. Our backs were sore. Our necks were stiff. Our eyes stung. Our skin prickled. Still we kept on hammering and hammering without stop, all day, under the boiling sun.”

Helao Shityuwete of SWAPO sentenced to 16 years narrated his experience on the lime quarry “… we were sent to work in the two lime quarries, chipping away at the rock-face with only picks, shovels and spades. It was very hard work and a drizzling glare came off the white rocks when the sun shone as we had no sunglasses, the eyesight of many of us was damaged”. Beside the quarries these material objects have also been used by political prisoners in other various works such as making and repairing roads dragging seaweed from the beaches and from the sea, clearing fields and chopping wood (Hutton, 1997: 57).

Baton sticks depicts apartheid political imprisonment assaults, in the early years of imprisonment most of the Warders were indoctrinated that they actually believed that black people were animals, not humans and that Warders were abusive and quick to react in beatings. Alexander (2013: 131) noted that from 1962 to 1964 assaults, very often brutal and mass assaults of political prisoners was a weekly, often a daily occurrence. A number of prisoners, including Andrew Masondo (a former lecturer in Mathematics at Fort Hare University College) and Dennis Brutus, were severely wounded Brutus even carried the scars of that day on his body until he left prison in 1965. Michael Dingake a former political prisoner shared his experience on the use of the baton stick during apartheid imprisonment “Armed with batons they raided our single cells in batches of three and four. ‘Teen die muur!’ (Against the wall!) ‘Trek uit.’ (Strip). A number of prisoners in the segregation section were assaulted………. Andimba Toivoja Toivo, the SWAPO leader was one of those who was severely beaten. After the assault, like the other victims of that 28th day of May 1971 he was forced to clean his blood-spattered cell.” (Hutton, 1997: 52). Neville (2013: 28) also narrated the same incident “Japhtha Masemola was beaten unconscious, while Abel Chiloane was so severely injured that for days he urinated blood.”
The ‘Mary’ and bamboo cane (Robben Island Museum collections)

The ‘Mary’ and ‘bamboo canes’ depicts severe and cruel maltreatment during imprisonment. According to the biography of Indres Naidoo by Albie Sachs the ‘Mary’ is a wooden frame like a ladder with a foot stand and hand holders on its sides. Indres Naidoo imprisoned on Robben Island in 1963 serving ten years is one of the victims of the ‘Mary’. In his biography he explains how he was ill-treated on the ‘Mary’. “My hands were strapped high above my head and then, as I lay at a forty-five-degree angle on the frame my ankles were tied......i heard the whistle of the cane and in the next moment it felt as though a sharp knife had cut right across my backside.” The punishment was done whilst the prisoner is naked. Indres Naidoo reiterated that after he was severely caned he had difficult sitting and could sleep, lying on his stomach, for about three weeks.

Prison clothes depict the racial classification of political prisoners inside the prison. Neville 2013 postulates that black prisoners were given short pants with no underwear, short sleeve shirts, sandals even in winter, but a very large percentage had to go barefoot for most of the year. Coloureds and Indians were given long pants, shoes and stockings in winter. If a doctor authorized it, certain African prisoners were given ‘Coloured’ clothing for reasons of health. He also reiterated that there was no adequate clothing in most cases when something was alleged to be out of stock or, for instance, when a broken shoe or sandal had to be repaired, a prisoner was going to be under clothed, in some cases prisoners were being forced to go and work in the rain without the protection of waterproof coverings. This however shows some
form of psychological effects of humiliation, especially to black political prisoners. Mac Maharaj in Hutton (1997: 62) described prison clothes that “This used to be made out of khaki and sailcloth, with one thin jersey given to you on 25 April and taken away on 25 September irrespective of whether it was going to be hot or cold in the intervening period. …..” In my view, I think racial classification of political prisoners inside the prison was a diplomatic move to separate or to make political prisoners hate each other as a way of avoiding future co-operation and unity among political prisoners in the prison.

Sisal mat (Robben Island Museum collection)

Mats, blankets, mattresses and beds depict the harshness of bedding during apartheid political imprisonment period. Neville (2013) postulates that bedding was inadequate, three blankets were issued to all prisoners in the early years usually in the worst possible condition, old, thin, dirty, and smelly things which ought to have been condemned years before. At the same time non-political prisoners enjoyed a proper set of blankets and black prisoners were not given beds until they are ill, they slept on sisal and felt mats. In addition, Mac Maharaj in Hutton (1997: 61) also states that no bedding in the form of bed sheets, pillows, bedspreads or pyjamas was provided for black political prisoners.

Censored letters also depict another form of psychological torture during political imprisonment. Most of political prisoners received their letters with information cut off and in some cases a prisoner can just see the greetings and salutations of the letter with all the content chopped off by prison authorities. In my view this affects psychologically as one can have more questions than answers regarding the actual content of the letter, as a result this can create mental instability to the receiver of the letter and breaks his morale.
Although plates, cutlery and cups were the same, the food was not the same, again there was segregation in terms of race as illustrated in the chart below. Racialism was done with the aim to divide, break solidarity and unity among political prisoners. I think racial segregation can be viewed as the prison inside the prison to black prisoners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Coloured/Asians</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mealie meal/rice/samp</td>
<td>400g</td>
<td>350g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mealies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>250g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>250g</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat or fish</td>
<td>110g (4x weekly)</td>
<td>60g (4x weekly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried beans</td>
<td>125g (meatless days)</td>
<td>125g (meatless days)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>250g</td>
<td>250g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soup/Protone/gravy powder</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>30g</td>
<td>15g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee or tea</td>
<td>twice daily</td>
<td>once daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phusamandla</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>55g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>15g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>60g</td>
<td>45g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from the table in Michael Dingake’s My Fight Against Apartheid.
Sanitary buckets depict the harshness of the prison. Indres Naidoo in Sachs (1982: 67-68) postulates that in the 1960s single cells of section B had no toilets so political prisoners kept in that section mostly leaders were using the bucket system to relieve themselves from nature calls and also use the same bucket for bathing. I think this shows a great deal of dehumanization, reducing human beings lower than animals, for instance in general most animals do not defecate in the same space as they eat. Indres Naidoo even stated that some of the times they were even called ‘pigs’ by prison warders.

Leg irons and Hand cuffs depict punishment and isolation. In my view besides a confined space or building as a place to isolate people handcuffs and leg irons also serve the purpose outside the building. Mr Salakatya Simuku former political prisoner from 1963 – 1966 described one of the uses of hand cuffs “ZolieKeke was amongst the youngest political prisoners during the early 1960s could not push the wheel barrow any more as his hands were full of blisters……He was taken to a shed nearby the quarry, three sets of hand cuffs were put on his hands and was asked to lie on a wooden plank that was designed like a triangle. He was beaten until he could not cry anymore from the beatings” According to Simuka, when they heard that ZoliileKeke was crying endlessly, the atmosphere in the quarry become tense,
everybody looked at the shed and stopped working. A voice came loud saying ‘Ma Africa niyayibonana lento (Africans can you see what is happening) (Robben Island Museum Ex – Political Prisoners Reference Group Project – 2003: Blue Stone Quarry 2). In addition, Neville (2013) stated that leg irons on the legs and hand cuffs on hands were put to political prisoners going for medical treatment off the Island.

CONCLUSION

Considering the above arguments that apartheid political imprisonment on Robben Island represents the triumph of human spirit over adversity and as a place of suffering and banishment, the current Robben Island Museum interpretation is not complete. It can be argued that the ‘triumphalism’ narrative is dominant at the expense of the inhumane and cruelty of political imprisonment era on the Island due to the absence of physical evidence which can remind and tell the cruelty. The absence of material culture objects which depicts the cruelty of imprisonment in the interpretation shows the evidence of the dominant ‘triumphalism’ narrative on Robben Island. The failure to attach memories and use material culture objects can have negative effects in the future interpretations because oral histories and memory changes with time and it is easy for one to mis-interpret. With such it is very important for the Museum to make use of the current rich memories and oral histories, attach them on objects and let objects tell their stories in the Museum.

The research is also aware of the shortage of a dedicated space for collections and unfavorable sea climatic conditions on the Island. This is a big challenge in trying to exhibit material culture objects to the public. However, one of the most celebrated Conservator in the
United States of America Toby Raphael recommends that a properly engineered enclosure has an equally great potential for protecting and preserving vulnerable collections. When objects on display are housed in well designed and carefully fabricated cases, they can be effectively preserved at levels remarkably close to those provided in storage. The only different from storage conditions is the exposure to light which can be controlled as well.

He further reiterates that a case designed with the participation of an exhibit conservator is an efficient and often cost-effective way to meet conservation criteria for an object. Establish performance criteria. The case should be designed to provide a performance that is to determine what conservation features will be built into each case, and clearly identify performance criteria for each feature. The cases can be inspected during fabrication to ensure that the fabricators stick to specifications. Test the fully assembled case in its final location to ensure that conservation criteria have been met. Such testing should occur before object installation to allow for adjustments.


THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON THE HERITAGE ENVIRONMENT ON ROBBEN ISLAND

BY
ODWA BUNGU

Abstract
This study looks at the impact of tourism on the heritage environment of Robben Island. It specifically gives attention to the construction of heritage in Robben Island and what significance it holds to the institution, staff and the visitors. It looks at how tourism becomes invented around heritage and whether this becomes positive or negative to the institution. The research shapes focus on whether there is a relationship between tourism and heritage in Robben Island if so how does one impact on the other.

It further looks at their different styles of management and how these styles conflict or collaborate with each other in their approach. It weighs Robben Island tourism sector on the scale of whether it contributes to the growth or plays a part in devaluing development of the heritage environment. The aspects explored are looked at through different sectors of Robben Island and how each looks at tourism development and management of the heritage site. The research is carried out through the use of observations and analysis. These observations are structured in a manner whereby I journey as a tourist to Robben Island and provide a follow up of analysis after the tour.

Literature review

Robben Island, a place very little known for being a site of punishment and incarceration is now known worldwide as a tourist attraction and world heritage site. It was not long ago (1999) when UNESCO declared Robben Island (Seal Island) in the Western Cape a World Heritage Site. Robben Island Museum changed from being a place of punishment and incarceration to be an official site to commemorate in the terms of 'the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. The making of the institution as a heritage site is closely related to the commemoration of the period of political imprisonment between 1961 and 1991, when
Robben Island was most notorious as a political prison for the leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle.

It is interesting how the institution has become famously known for the imprisonment of the great former black South African president Nelson Mandela. However, its history consists of different ways in which the Island was used whereby some are selected and some are passively mentioned to the public. This exclusion and selectiveness of history involves the institution previously used as a place of isolation, banishment and exile for nearly 400 years. It was also used as a post office; a grazing ground, a mental hospital for leprosy patients. In the construction of Robben Island as a heritage site it was used as a pinnacle of oneness and nationness.

In Anderson (1993:4) it is explained that nations are not biological notions rather they are socially constructed notions that back the idea of unity and oneness. They are forged through a series of historical events to form an end product of poetic heroism and patriotism that turns a blind eye on the inequalities within the communities being united. The Island is perceived rich with its invented heritage that mostly considers intangible heritage (ideas about heritage) as a form to give significance to tangible heritage (objects considered as heritage). Meaning that all the buildings in Robben Island will have no significance if they were to be removed and placed in another context.

According to Harvey (2001) heritage is depicted as a verb, a process that is related to human action and agency. Heritage can be tangible or intangible; it can be resembled through objects or ideas. Therefore, to Robben Island heritage mostly revolves around what is perceived as the memoir of the political prisoners. In Kathrada (1997) it is stated that ‘we will not want Robben Island to be a monument to our hardship and suffering. We would want it to be a monument reflecting the triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil’.

‘A triumph of freedom and human dignity over repression and humiliation; a triumph of wisdom and largeness of spirit against small minds and pettiness; triumph of courage and determination over human frailty and weakness; a triumph of non-racialism over bigotry and intolerance; a triumph of the new South Africa over the old’ (Kathrada, 1997:10-11). Prior to the above this reflects that Robben Island was created as a heritage site through ideas specifically from the political prisoners that were imprisoned on the Island.
It was a mechanism to escape pain and gruesome history instead create a heroic account. Meaning that without the ideas Robben Island would have no significance as a heritage environment. The notion of nationness has turned the way in which people view Robben Island, it has created an interest for people to see and witness the experience of this place where the South African nation was built. For example; in the visitor management plan of Robben Island (2013-2018) it is stated that since Robben Island was establishment as a World Heritage Site, large numbers of visitors have come to The Robben Island World Heritage Site (RIWHS).

Figures are provided as follows in 2011 a total of 218899 people have visited the Island, with an average of 618 people per day. Meaning that, Robben Island has become a place of interest to both local and international tourists. Not only has the Island become a major tourist attraction in South Africa, it is also known as an iconic place that is close to the heart of the Nation and many people all over the world. It is therefore suggested that visiting Robben Island to be critical for every visitor to be given a chance for their visit to the Island to be an optimal experience.

**Data Collected**

In the Data collection I took a period of 10 days to collect the data through observations and the analysis of these observations. On the first day I conducted observations at the Nelson Mandela Gateway. I watched the screening exhibition of the singing former political prisoners that sang songs about the past struggles. The singing is accompanied by poetic messages and praise singing that narrates part of what occurred in the past. It consists of different political prisoners with a selected few sharing their personal experiences of the past Apartheid. It seems as if the songs being sang and the body language of the choir is meant to send a message about the victory and the triumph of the human spirit over adversity.

After observing the message from the short documentary, I followed a group of tourists up a stairway to another room on the upper floor. When I reached the top of the stairs everyone freely roamed around to look at the exhibitions as we were all waiting for the ferry that is transporting us to Robben Island. At first I gazed on the white calico cloth scribbled with a black highlighter with different signatures and messages. It is said by one of the guides to be
a memory cloth that serves as a reminder about the struggles of the past. After observing the memory cloth, I quickly glanced at the rest of the exhibition whilst following a group of tourists who were rushing to catch the 09:00 am ferry to Robben Island.

We went through the area where the Robben Island staff checks tickets and after this process we proceeded into the ferry. Inside the ferry everyone is seated down for instructions and safety measures on how a life jacket works in case of an emergency. The Thembekile (translation-trusted) Ferry takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes from the Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island Museum. In that period tourists take an opportunity to take different pictures from different views of the sea, the Table Mountain is also visible and also pictures of seals and other animals that live in the sea. On the Arrival at Robben Island we (tourists) are already instructed to proceed to the shuttles where the general tour guides are already waiting confidently with a smile.

The group of tourists is divided into two groups whereby one goes on board (shuttles) and the other group starts their tour by walking straight to the prison. The first stop that the bus driver took is the Robert Sobukwe house. A brief history was given about the Great Pan African Congress (P.A.C) leader. After that we were informed to go and view the exhibition inside the Sobukwe house. Inside the house were pictures of Sobukwe his wife and children and these objects that were previously used by Sobukwe were neatly placed in a pattern as though they were recently used.

Proceeding from day one on day two I simply did a research on the Island by reading through the articles and books that will help assist in the research that I am undertaking. On this day I did a follow up based on the previous day which is day two. An article by Myburgh states Robben Island to have created a memories project in order to record an intangible heritage. A case in point of the above is that of a memory cloth that serves as a reminder about the struggles of the past. This memory cloth is created from nothing and given a story with a representation to become something.

Now this cloth will have significance and will be of interest to tourists. Adding an essential point is that RIM (Robben Island Museum) used memory as a tool to build information and connect a great content to the artefacts. On the fourth day I visited the former departure area to the Island known as the Jetty 1; in this area I simply observed that it had exhibitions that
demonstrated and painted a picture on how prisoners were handled before they were moved to the Island. This exhibition mostly revolved around Nelson Mandela as it points out that a cell that was used by many political prisoners before and after it was known as Nelson Mandela cell.

Therefore, on this day even tourists were excited and curious to see the Mandela holding cell. In a way this was some sort of heritage strategy prepared for consumption. Therefore, in a way this impacted heritage in a positive way as it magnifies heritage. But Tourism also impacts Robben Island heritage negatively because it only came up with a business strategy that highlights an icon over the heritage of people and their history.

Following on the above on day five I visited Robben Island and on a talk I had with one of the staff members I was informed Robben Island to be made by the memory of Ex political prisoners and Ex warders. On a later stage of the project as I was doing my readings I confirmed the statement given by the staff member. On day six- I visited the cell stories in A-section, this exhibition revolved around personal artefacts of political prisoners and how the artefacts hold a great memory about the experience of the former political prisoners. On day seven I was doing observations in waterfront as I realized that most of the stores that are near to waterfront are most likely to sell a Madiba shirt (Nelson Mandela t-shirt) and also other cultural artefacts.

On day eight I did a short reflection on what I had covered from day 5 till 7. The outcome of this reflection and analysis was that; I firstly found out that the store I was conducting my observations in is owned by a former Robben Island prison warder. This shop sold clothes that are branded by the name of Nelson Mandela. In this reflection I had argued that the reason for this strategy is obviously a business strategy that markets heritage in a tourism domain for wealth gain but also for marketing Robben Island.

On day nine I visited the Island and what I had observed as remarkable on that day is the demonstration that is given by the Ex political prisoner when narrating his personal experience on the Island. In this demonstration he carried bondages and shackles and explained what they were used for and how they were used. He demonstrated the steps and explained how they were searched, separated and allocated into their cells.
In this day the tour guide grabbed the attention of tourists and everyone in the group was active asking questions and giving feedback. At the end of the prison tour the tourists each gave a fair share of a tip showing gratitude for a good expression and good narration. Reflecting to this day I realized that tourism had made the situation to seem as if it was some sort of a financial transaction, whereby an individual had to sell his painful and traumatic experience in exchange for money. However, this situation can be looked at differently when you looking at it in the lenses of heritage. In heritage it may have simply looked as if the individual was just trying to pass the message to the audience (tourists).

On the tenth day I simply used observations on the ferry. I noticed that the ferry does not have tour guides to explain the background information about the tour of Robben Island. But we were simply informed about safety precautions and the usage of life jackets.

**Analyses of Data**

A brief background: - Robben Island is a place that is marked by contestations and debates on its use. Firstly, in the 1960 it is said that it has been highly contested over what it symbolizes. It is still contested for its future as it has been contested in the past. The contestations are as follows; firstly, it has been stated that the Island could be used as a nature reserve or a holiday resort. Another argument is that Robben Island should have hotels and lodges to accommodate tourists. However, one argument prevails more than the others that the Island has been a place of pain therefore this should be converted into heroic accounts about the political leaders.

This history has helped in understanding as to why Robben Island and its part of decision making seem to be hugely questioned and contested by every individual that feels to have power of interference in decision making. For example, this is a site where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated but after his release he played a huge role on this site. As much as Robben Island is said to have magnified the image of Mandela but it is Mandela himself who also took part in Magnifying Robben Island into a world Heritage Site.

Tourism operations started on the Island a limited number of visitors (265 per day) have been used in order to control the number of visitors and the tours that occurred on the Island. This project placed emphasis on the process of heritage management whereby visitations were
controlled in order to limit any form of destruction or to make means of conserving. The management of heritage is later compared to the consumption of heritage which is overlooked to be a product. This has led to the development of a business strategy for marketing purposes on the one hand.

It has also led to be a fundraising strategy for the Island on the other hand. Hence the involvement of funders and international stakeholders leads to the commercializing of heritage and the branding of heritage products for tourism and business purposes. At some point the commercializing of heritage meant the exclusion of local tourists and citizens as the prices for tickets are high. The cost of the tour out to the Island places the experience out of reach for the majority of South Africans because the ticket price may be equivalent to the wages of some South Africans.

However, at a later stage the RIM has improvised and took the initiative to also make tours that accommodate the less fortune. For example, a primary or high school tour that consists of leaners being charged at an affordable price for the whole group and not individually. This initiative changes the experience and also combats socio economic dynamics that the heritage and tourism of Robben Island face. Prior to the above, the initiative is made distinct and more affordable than the standard tour but it is still as monitored as the standard tour. The standard tour is said to be constructed around the representations of the past struggle and its freedom.

Kruger analyses the tour to be constructed in a manner that limits the choice of the Tourist gaze. Meaning tourists are guided where to go and what to look at through organized tours. Prior to the above, visitors are ushered into a waiting bus and remain confined in the vehicle during a one-hour tour around the Island. It is only at the prison that one has the time to think, reflect and meditate on the information being provided by an Ex political prisoner who is now a tour guide.

As much as the tour uses holistic approach but it focuses more on the prison, this is due to time limitation that visitors are given on the Island. These limitations are a result of tourism with a huge traffic of overcrowding done by tourists seeking to visit this heritage site. To simplify the above tourists are mostly given a passive experience of Robben Island. How is this? This is due to the fact that they are given too much information within a short period of time
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ROBBEN ISLAND: A NAMIBIAN HERITAGE SITE: WHAT MEASURES WERE TAKEN TO DOCUMENT NAMIBIAN EX POLITICAL PRISONERS IN NAMIBIAN AND THE ROBBEN ISLAND MUSEUM?

BY

REVECCA HAUFIKU

Introduction

After the First World War ended, Germany had to give up all its colonies, Namibia known as (South West Africa) at the time was a colony of German. At the treaty of Versailles, Namibia was put in the hands of Britain under a mandate system administrated by the League of Nations. South Africa was colonised by Britain therefore Namibia fell in the hands of the white South African government, to guide and prepare for independence. South Africa was not allowed to have military camps in Namibia or to recruit the Namibian people for military services. The South African government wanted to annex Namibia legally and rule it as part of the South African territory; however, this was not possible legally. So they forcefully ruled Namibia as a South African territory.324

By the 1950s Namibia people wanted their independence, they had grown tired of the tyrannical white South Africa rule. 10 December 1959, the white South African government opened fire on a peaceful demonstration killing at least 11 people this number including woman. This event made Namibian people want to take up arms. One of the methods Namibians used to combat apartheid was through the formation of political parties and student organisations. Ovamboland Peoples Organisation was (OPO) was first formed as contract worker’s union and later turned in to a fully fledged political party. The name later changed to South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO) to accommodate all Namibians and not just the Ovambo people. SWAPO’s aims were to end apartheid and the contract labour system; however, they were met with even more harsh conditions by the white government. Realising that freedom could not be attained by nonviolent ways, hundreds of Namibians fled the country into exile to prepare and train as soldiers.325

324 Namibia The Facts, IDAF Publications Ltd. A publishing company of International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa Canon Collins House, 64 Essex Road, London N1 8LR.

Namibians were able to send messages and speak to the UN, Toivo ya Toivo (founding member of OPO) managed to send a tape recorded message to the UN. By 1960 the UN had received 120 messages and pretentions from Namibians and sympathisers.\footnote{Namibia The Facts, IDAF Publications Ltd. A publishing company of International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa Canon Collins House, 64 Essex Road, London N1 8LR.}

By 1966, SWAPO was sending back trained guerrilla fighters into Namibia, to go and set up military camps and train Namibian people on guerrilla tactics. Four groups consisting of ten men each were send back on different days each going into Namibia from different routes and directions. However, some members of the second group were arrested in the Rundu area, near the Boarder of Angola. They were later taken to Pretoria Central prison in South Africa to await trail, from the 250 Namibian soldiers arrested and detained from different regions and different guerrilla groups only 37 were charged. This people were considered terrorist and dangerous, the case has been known as: The state v. Tuhadeleni and 36 others. Out of the accused, some got life in prison, some got twenty years in prison and others ranged from five to one year detentions. The accused that got life and 20 years had to serve their sentences on the Robben Island prison.\footnote{Helao Shityuwete, \textit{Never Follow the Wolf}, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR.}

The imprisonment of the Namibian political prisoners on Robben Island, far from everything they knew, far from their families and far from their country and countrymen was meant to break them and change their need and want to fight for freedom, to liberate their country and country men from the shackles of apartheid. Their imprisonment in a country they did not recognize as their own, and would never consider being their own, had the Namibian political prisoners bewildered and would come to have some massive implications that can be explained historically.

My argument for this research paper is that, a site like Robben Island with such an extensive significant historical background, where suffering took place, it is important to show all aspects of Robben Island Museum, in particular to the documenting of Namibian ex political prisoners. This research is about the various moments and Namibian people who passed through Robben Island and which gives me an insight into the Namibian colonial history.
Chapter 1

Life in prison

"We find ourselves here in a foreign country, convicted under laws made by people whom we have always considered as foreigners. We find ourselves tried by a judge who is not our countryman and who has not shared our background.

We are Namibians and not South Africans. We do not now, and will not in the future, recognize your right to govern us, to make laws for us in which we have no say; to treat our country as if it were your property and us as if you were our masters.

We are far away from our homes; not a single member of our families has come to visit us, never mind be present at our trial.

The South African Government has again shown its strength by detaining us for as long as it pleased, keeping some of us in solitary confinement for 300 to 400 days and bringing us to its capital to try us. It has shown its strength by passing an Act especially for us and having it made retrospective. It has even chosen an ugly name to call us by. One’s own are called patriots, or at least rebels; your opponents are called terrorists.

We know that whites do not think of blacks as politicians--only as agitators. Many of our people, through no fault of their own have had no education at all. This does not mean that they do not know what they want.

Our grievances are called 'so-called' grievances. We do not believe South Africa is in South West Africa in order to provide facilities and work for non whites. It is there for its own selfish reasons. For the first 40 years it did practically nothing to fulfil its 'sacred trust’. It only concerned itself with the welfare of the whites.

Since 1962 because of the pressure from inside by the non-whites and especially my organisation and because of the limelight placed on our country by the world, South Africa has been trying to do a bit more. It rushed the Bantustan Report so that it would at least have something to say at the World Court.
Only one who is not white and has suffered the way we have can say whether our grievances are real or `so-called`.

Those of us who have some education, together with our uneducated brethren, have always struggled to get freedom.

Your Government, my Lord, undertook a very special responsibility, when it was awarded the mandate over us after the First World War. It assumed a sacred trust to guide us towards independence and to prepare us to take our place among the nations of the world.

We believe that South Africa has abused that trust because of its belief in racial supremacy (that white people have been chosen by God to rule the world) and apartheid. We believe that for 50 years South Africa had failed to promote the development of our people. Where are our trained men? The wealth of our country has been used to train your people for leadership and the sacred duty of preparing the indigenous people to take their place among the nations of the world has been ignored.

I do not claim that it is easy for men of different races to live at peace with one another. I myself had no experience of this in my youth, and at first it surprised me that men of different races could live together in peace. But now I know it to be true and to be something to which we must strive.

The South African Government creates hostility by separating people and emphasizing their differences. We believe that by living together, people will learn to lose their fear of each other. We also believe that this fear which some of the whites have of Africans is based on their desire to be superior and privileged and that when whites see themselves as part of South West Africa, sharing with us all its hopes and troubles, then that fear will disappear. Separation is said to be a natural process. But why, then, is it imposed by force, and why then is it the whites have the superiority?

I have come to know that our people cannot expect progress as a gift from anyone, be it the United Nations or South Africa. Progress is something we shall have to struggle and work for. And I believe that the only way in which we shall be able and fit to secure that progress is to learn from our own experience and mistakes.
Your Lordship emphasized in your judgement the fact that our arms came from communist countries and also that words commonly used by communists were to be found in our documents. But my Lord, in the documents produced by the State, there is another type of language. It appears even more often than the former. Many documents finish up with an appeal to the Almighty to guide us in our struggle for freedom. It is the wish of the South African Government that we should be discredited in the Western world. That is why it calls our struggle a communist plot; but this will not be believed by the world. The world knows that we are not interested in ideologies.

We feel that the world as a whole has a special responsibility towards us. This is because the land of our fathers was handed over to South Africa by a world body. It is a divided world, but it is a matter of hope for us that it at least agrees about one thing—that we are entitled to freedom and justice.

Other mandated territories have received their freedom. The judgement of the World Court was a bitter disappointment to us. We felt betrayed and we believed that South Africa would never fulfil its trust. Some felt that we would secure our freedom only by fighting for it. We knew that the power of South Africa is overwhelming, but we also knew that our case is a just one and our situation intolerable—why should we not receive our freedom?

We are sure that the world’s efforts to help us in our plight will continue, whatever South Africans may call us.

We do not expect that independence will end our troubles, but we do believe that our people are entitled—as are all peoples—to rule themselves. It is not really a question whether South Africa treats us well or badly, but that South West Africa is our country and we wish to be our own masters.

There are some who will say that they are sympathetic with our aims, but that they condemn violence. I would answer that I am not by nature a man of violence and I believe that violence is a sin against God and my fellow men. SWAPO itself was a non-violent organization, but the South African Government is not truly interested in whether opposition is violent or non-violent. It does not wish to hear any opposition to apartheid.
Is it surprising that in such times my countrymen have taken up arms? Violence is truly fearsome, but who would not defend his property and himself against a robber? And we believe that South Africa has robbed us of our country.

I have spent my life working in SWAPO, which is an ordinary political party like any other.

My Lord, you found it necessary to brand me as a coward. During the Second World War, when it became evident that both my country and your country were threatened by the dark clouds of Nazism, I risked my life to defend both of them, wearing a uniform with orange bands on it.

But some of your countrymen when called to battle to defend civilisation resorted to sabotage against their own fatherland. I volunteered to face German bullets, and as a guard of military installations, both in South West Africa and the Republic, was prepared to be the victim of their sabotage. Today they are our masters and are considered the heroes, and I am called the coward.

When I consider my country, I am proud that my countrymen have taken up arms for their people and I believe that anyone who calls himself a man would not despise them.

I had no answer to the question: 'Where has your non-violence got us'? Whilst the World Court judgement was pending, I at least had that to fall back on. When we failed, after years of waiting, I had no answer to give to my people.

Even though I did not agree that people should go into the bush, I could not refuse to help them when I knew that they were hungry. I even passed on the request for dynamite. It was not any easy decision. Another man might have been able to say 'I will have nothing to do with that sort of thing'. I was not, and I could not remain a spectator in the struggle of my people for their freedom.

I am a loyal Namibian and I could not betray my people to their enemies. I admit that I decided to assist those who had taken up arms. I know that the struggle will be long and bitter. I also know that my people will wage that struggle, whatever the cost.

Only when we are granted our independence will the struggle stop. Only when our human dignity is restored to us, as equals of the whites, will there be peace between us.
My co-accused and I have suffered. We are not looking forward to our imprisonment. We do not, however, feel that our efforts and sacrifice have been wasted. We believe that human suffering has its effect even on those who impose it. We hope that what has happened will persuade the whites of South Africa that we and the world may be right and they may be wrong. Only when white South Africans realize this and act on it, will it be possible for us to stop our struggle for freedom and justice in the land of our birth".  

This is a statement made by Andimba Herman Toivo Ya Toivo, from the dock whiles on trial in Pretoria South Africa. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Toivo ya Toivo is representing Namibia in his speech, he declares loudly proudly how the Namibian people felt, and he makes it clear in his speech that he did not recognize the white South African rule in Namibia, and would continue fighting for the Independence of his country.

When the Namibian prisoners arrived on Robben Island they first stayed in the Zinc cells also known as the Zinc tronk. However, they were later moved to the D-section were they served out the rest of their sentence. Toivo ya Toivo was kept in solitary confinement and later moved to B section with leaders from ANC, PAC and many others.  

By the year 1968, Namibians started work on the rubbish-dump; they had not been given equipment and had to clean up this place using their bare hands. When this job was done they got more work chopping wood, they did not complain about it, as this was a way for them to spend time outside the prison cells, get fresh air, and make time go by faster they also worked on the Lime stone quarry and Bamboo factory, the work on the Lime quarry was labour intensive and some Namibians got hurt while working there. There were no sporting activities, and the Namibians would demand to go out to exercise, eventual they were allowed to go out and exercise for 30 minutes every day.


329 Helao Shityuwete, Never Follow the Wolf, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR.

330 Helao Shityuwete, Never Follow the Wolf, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR.

331 Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
In the 1970s the 30-minute exercise turned into football; however, this had its boundaries and limitations. The political prisoners in D-section could only play football against themselves and football matches could only be played on Saturdays each section had a particular time allocation. This was done to prevent the prisoners from interacting and exchanging ideas of political essence. This made playing football very boring and the Namibians in D-section persistently asked for sections to play against each other to make the sports more enjoyable and competitive. However, sports were not restricted to only football, but prisoners were allowed to play Chess, Drafts and table tennis.\textsuperscript{332} Prisoners were not allowed to do any Arts and culture activities, but due to the fact that prisoners had so much time on their hands they were relentlessly looking for activities to do. With the realisation that they could get away with getting what they wanted they continued fighting and asked for the cells to be opened so they could spend more time outside instead of being cooped up in the cold cells all day long. When this battle was won, the section would open at 7:30 am and close 4:30 pm. After lock up time the prisoners would then find creative ways to spend that time, by creating plays and making craft with their bare hands. For example, one prisoner in D-section once created, but the warders saw this as a threat and ploy to attempt escaping from prison so they confiscated the boat.\textsuperscript{333}

Namibian political prisoners told stories about their families, taught each other songs, and sang songs of freedom to kill time. This helped them form a bond of brotherhood and solidarity. During the day when the prisoners had nothing to do they would play Owela (a stone game) in the prison yard. Owela is played by digging four vertical holes in a row and twelve horizontal holes parallel to each other. It is played by two people sitting on opposite sides; this game can be played in teams of two or more people.\textsuperscript{334}

Prisoners wanted to ensure that their fellow comrades got an education whiles on Robben Island prison, be it formal education or informal they were adamant that all the prisoners be educated, the Namibians felt this to be important as firstly they were deprived of an education by the colonial masters and wanted to study while in prison to improve themselves and also be able to go back and impact their country in a positive way after they gained their

\textsuperscript{332} Helao Shityuwete, \textit{Never Follow the Wolf}, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR, Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)

\textsuperscript{333} Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)

\textsuperscript{334} Helao Shityuwete, \textit{Never Follow the Wolf}, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR, Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
Independence. However, the prison authority viewed education as a privilege instead of it being a right, and therefore only prisoners were not allowed to have formal education, only the ones who could not read and write where give right to learn the basics, and the only book they were allowed to read was the bible.

This decision was met with feud and was highly contested; prisoners felt it very important to have a formal education. They drew up petitions demanding, distance studies with training colleges and higher learning institutions. The need for education in prison was so high that the prisoners established informal education methods and structures. The classes were held at night after lock up, the prisoners who were well equipped in a certain subject would teach other prisoners.

A classificatory system was introduced in the 1970s; this consisted of groups A, B, C and D. This grouping system meant prisoners with good behaviour would be upgraded to A, and prisoners with bad behaviour would be reduced in rank to D, and this would mean that privileges like education would be removed, and this group had no privileges group D was the admission level. Prisoners in the D group were considered to be trouble and ill-mannered prisoners; however, the Namibians refused to be classified by groups in order to study. After disputes and difficulties with the prison authority they were finally allowed to study, the difficulty to this is that the prisoners had to finance their own studies, so only two managed to study as the rest of the Namibian prisoners, their families could not afford to send them money. By the 1980s the predicament with education had improved and all the prisoners were allowed to study even though they had financial difficulties, for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provided financial aid to the prisoners.

The Namibian prisoners did not trust ICRC, and at first thought they were work against them so they refused any financial aid and meetings. In 1979 ICRC set up a private meeting with the Namibian political prisoners, without the warders. The Namibians soon come to realise that this organisation had good intentions and they later trusted them even though they were still a bit sceptical.

335 Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
336 Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
Practicing politics in prison was frowned upon, but the Namibian political prisoners found a way to commemorate significant Namibian political days like Kassinga day and others. They had a committee that had the responsibility of gathering the importance of that day, and presenting their findings and then hold a remembrance ceremony, they would sing freedom songs and give speeches. This would happen around lunch time when the warders would take their lunch; these commemorations usually had representatives from different South African political groups paying their respects. 338

Information, news and political progress was very important to the prisoners, the Namibians were in charge of collecting newspaper articles that were deemed important. The prisoners would get newspapers it did not matter who they got them, but one way that was very risky was the hole in the garden. The D-section had a garden, the prisoners dug a hole close to the fence and one of the prisoner would sneak out, go to the dumping site, collect whatever he found to be important and then come back, but the hole would only be opened if the gourds were not in sight, they had some sort of secret communication. This information that was collected would then be disseminated to other sections of the prison using coded messaging and different channels of operation, all the prisoners were part of this big chain of concealing information and then reading it and passing it on. 339

Warders were friends with some of the prisoners from D-section, and therefore the prisoners convinced the warders to smuggle in a small radio in exchange for the radio, and new batteries, the prisoners had to be very friendly to the warders and gave them information about studies, they helped the warders register for studies and also helped them with the studying. They kept the radio hidden in a hole in the yard, and some prisoners would sit in a group and pretend to be playing a game and one would listen through the ear phone, while another would keep an eye out to see if a warder is coming. They would then write the news on a paper and then the news would be circulated around to other sections. 340

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338 Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
339 Helao Shityuwete, Toivo ya Toivo, Oral Interview (Namibia), September 2015, Helao Shityuwete, Never Follow the Wolf, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR, Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
340 Helao Shityuwete, Never Follow the Wolf, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR, Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
The D-section was also known as the sewing section, Mr Lilongo was a professional tailor, he was tasked with making uniform for Robben Island prisoners and uniform for prisoners from other prisons as well. He would make changes to warder uniform and prisoner uniform as well, prisoners were not allowed in B-section so he could not go there to get measurements, and warders had to get the measurements for him to be able to make the uniform. He would make the uniform either too big or too small, so he could blame it on the warders for giving him wrong measurements. He was later given a free pass to the B-section were all the political leaders where held, he went to take their measurements but in this process he gathered messages from them and he passed it on to other prisoners.341

This chapter looked at the early life of imprisonment for the Namibian political prisoner, the struggles, the battles they have fought in prison and the once they have won. The continued isolation of some and the type of food they ate, the work spans and the yarning to go back home to a place that was familiar to them. This chapter shows you the element of resistance from the Namibian prisoners who refused to be categories in this A-D group classification. This chapter looks at the endurance and the strategies that the Namibians used to stay creative and to keep building their sprit and fighting even when they were held down in the walls of the prison yard and buildings they still kept on fighting the Independence of Namibia.

341 Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
Chapter 2

Brutality of the Namibian ex political prisoner

This chapter looks at the hardship of Robben Island that the prisoners faced, and the brutality that was administrated by the warders on Robben Island. When the Namibians first arrived on Robben Island they were kept in the Zinc Cells, the cells were build out of Zinc material and had cement flooring, the prisoners each had two sisal mat, one flat mat and four soft blankets each so the floors were very cold and the prison uniform could not help the with the cold, as each prisoner was given two shorts, two shirts and two canvas jackets with no underwear or shoes. Most of the political prisoners suffer from all kinds of illnesses due to the cold and harsh winter nights on Robben Island. 342

The Namibian political prisoners were involved in a lot of different working groups, so in this process they experienced a lot of hardship, the machinery in the Bamboo factory created dust and therefore the dust gave prisoners chest problems, the Lime quarry was dangerous as the prisoners did not get protective uniform, the stones that prisoners dug up at the Lime quarry was used to build the road, however they would work at the Lime quarry in the hot scotching sun and they were not allowed to stand up straight to rest their backs, this was frowned upon. If the prisoners broke any rules at the work they were punished for it, minor offences meant being locked up in solitary confinement and being deprived of meals for however long the warders felt necessary. One particular Namibian prisoner had an accident at the Lime quarry, Mr. John Shipponeni, fell from a make shift step which was 5 meters down, he twisted his knee upside down, and did not receive any medical attention for three days, only when his knee started turning a green was he then taken to hospital in Cape Town. When he comes back from hospital his leg had to be amputated, his follow Namibian comrades cried when they saw what had happened to him. 343

342 Helao Shityuwete, Never Follow the Wolf, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR, Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)

343 Helao Shityuwete, Never Follow the Wolf, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR, Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing), Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
Isolation was one of the tools that the prison system used to punish the prisoners; they would get thrown into solitary cells in this period all privileges were taken away, and the only thing they were allowed was the Bible. This kind of punishment had to stop in the 1980’s as the prisoners would take these cases up to their layers and then charges would be laid with the prison department. 344

The Namibians were not allowed to receive letters, this meant that they had no news from home and family, they had no idea how the people were doing at home. The letters would have given the Namibian political prisoners some form of moral support, since they were imprisoned in a Land they did not recognise as their own. In the 1960s Namibian prisoners were not allowed any visitors except for their layers. They were not allowed any physical contact or communication with the outside world. The prison system wanted to break the Namibians on Robben Island and their spirits. In the 1970s this however changed and the Namibian prisoners could receive one visit per month, but due to the fact the South Africa is so far from Namibia, most of the prisoner’s families could not afford to visit them in prison. Some prisoners therefore left Robben Island prison without ever getting family visits. The process of visiting had politics of its own, for example the person who wanted to visit had to be 30 years or older, had to be a close relative and still had to apply to visit and if the prison did not allow the visit then the person could not visit. This system was created to disadvantage family members from wanting to visit another thing that was troubles was the fact the Namibian people would travel days and thousands of kilometres and then only get to see their family members for thirty minutes, the Namibian political prisoners contested the time allocation and claimed that is was unfair for this people to travel so far, and only get thirty minutes together, so the time was changed to one hour for the visiting Namibians, and they could also come back the next day to visit their relatives in prison if they so wished. In this time period prisoners were also allowed one letter per month, although this letters had to be opened first by the prison authority and whatever information sounded suspicious or political was cut of the letter prisoners would then get letters that had sections chopped out of them, and sometimes they would get the salutation and the ending. However, this did not deter the prisoners as they still looked forward to receiving this letters. This letters were very important as this was the only part of home they had, the only connection. Family member of the Namibian political prisoners were usually harassed and followed and spied on by the

344 Helao Shityuwete, Never Follow the Wolf, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR, Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing), Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
South African white government, they were always suspicious and trying to get any information they could. They would pretend to be going to visit their families also, just to spy on this Namibians travelling to go visit their relatives in prison.345

The Namibians had refused to be classified in the A, B, C and D groups, so they had remained in D for a very long time, so they had very few to no privileges at all for a long time in prison. This however did not stop them, they continued going on hunger strikes until their needs were met. Even though they had refused to be classified in these groups, the authorities gave in to the Namibian political prisoner’s demands and they could get two visits per month, two letters could be sent and received. The prison authority classified them in them in the C-group in order for them to give them those privileges. Namibians political prisoners could not stomach the food that was served; they complained that the food was never well cooked. When prisoners were misbehaving their punishment was going on a spare diet, this meant that prisoners did not get food the whole day or they got half of their normal ratio. However, prisoners did not really see this as punishment, as the other prisoners would smuggle food to them. 346

**What has Namibia done?**

History in the Namibian text books does is not inclusive to that of the history of the Namibians that were imprisoned on Robben Island. In the Namibian school history context there were no Namibians imprisoned on Robben Island, this meaning that you have the Namibian youths graduating high school without the significant knowledge that there some Namibian political prisoners were imprisoned on Robben Island. In this section I will critically analyse why the education system in Namibia is not inclusive of the Robben Island narrative.

How does Namibia educate its learners if history being taught at the grass root levels is not an inclusive narrative of all aspects of the Namibian history in particular the Namibian ex political prisoners that were imprisoned on Robben Island. One needs to analyse and comprehend the past so that it can enlighten and educate the present. The learners are meant

345 Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
346 Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, Kliptown Books, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex RD, London N1 8LR, Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing), Robben Island Museum, Heritage Centre (data capturing)
to imagine the past and their hero’s, they can then evaluate and decide how they want to live
their future,\textsuperscript{347} by learning and engaging in topics that are of interest to them.

Textbooks are state approved particularly in Namibia where schools are either (Public or
private) and they all have or share a similar curriculum. The state then has a say in the way
that history text books and other how other subjects are structured in text books. This shows
you that the dominant power has a subjective way of choosing what is important to be taught
in schools this is evident in the Namibian school’s history curriculum and history text books.
Usually in said situations it’s the political party in power that tells more of its story. However,
in the Namibian case, most of the political prisoners that were imprisoned on Robben Island
were members of SWAPO. Critically looking at this situation one could then go ahead and
say that every political party has its internal issues, but in this case it looked like SWAPO
wanted to suppress the experience of the Namibian political prisoners that were imprisoned
on Robben Island, however these political prisoners are also considered heroes in Namibia
but their names are not lifted as high as other political heroes.

The past is often restructured not as fact but to serve the interest of particular groups in
society who holds power at that particular point in time, which is the dominant ideology,
when the past is reconstructed. Significant theorists question the role of institutions in
silencing the voices of underrepresented groups in society especially those at the minor stages
of the social and economic separation. Niggerbrügge, argues that “teaching history and
history textbooks as one of its main tools to make and disseminate this idea. Therefore, this
must be seen within the power structure of the nation state”.\textsuperscript{348} Education practitioners and
learners need to advocate for education reform and a more transparent curriculum, I will go
ahead and suggest methods that aim to empower learners in teaching them a diversified
Namibian history instead of one that has a lot of holes and secrets.

\textsuperscript{347} Turnbridge & Ashworth, \textit{Dissonant heritage}, p.6.
\textsuperscript{348} Niggerbrügge (2004, p. 3)
Independence Memorial Museum of Namibia

The multimillion-dollar museum, constructed by a North Korean company, is Namibia’s first history museum and was established to spear head history in Namibia. The museum is a memorial institution and it aims to symbols the resistance of Namibians against colonialism and to tell record and preserve the Namibian history. The museum features different liberation struggles that Namibia had to face against the colonial power. The museum is a place where Namibia's long history of anti-colonial resistance and the national liberation struggle is being told. The museum will serve as a commemoration site for the Namibian liberation struggle.

The majority of the artefacts in the museum are paintings and photographs and original objects of military attire that form part of the exhibitions, narratives of certain significant events in Namibian history are up against the wall next to the relevant photograph or artefacts. Interviews in the form of audio, videos are used to tell the story of individuals; however, photographs and murals are used to give a visual image of the Liberation struggle. Other artefacts such as uniforms are also on display to create realistic interpretation of encounter.

This image below is the Robben Island exhibition in the Namibian Memorial museum, next to it is a corner with a replica of a Robben Island prison cell and next to the cell is a telephone and a see through glass that represent the place where visitors were taken to communicate and see their imprisoned relatives, this is what represents the Namibians that were imprisoned on Robben Island prison. This image does not say anything besides the heading, Namibian Political Prisoners on Robben Island. Then you have the below image with portraits of all the Namibian prisoners that were incarcerated on Robben Island, under each individual portrait are yellow sticker with the name of the ex political prisoner and the date of imprisonment and date of release.

The Memorial museum is a multimillion-dollar museum; the museum curator should have looked at other ways of telling the Namibian Robben Island ex political prisoner’s story differently. In a country that is not aware that some Namibian politicians were imprisoned on

349 Namibian Sun 203 on Tue, 2013-07-30 08:20 (Namibian news paper)
Robben Island, after seeing the image of the prisoners what is the reaction going to be and there should be some type of text explaining, and giving a brief narrative of the history leading up to the Namibians being imprisoned and their life on Robben Island. The Memorial museum, yes they have recognition of the Namibians that were imprisoned on Robben Island. However, the significance that the Namibian ex political prisoner that were imprisoned on Robben Island have contributed to the liberation struggle of Namibian is not perpetuated in the museum’s current exhibition. The Memorial museum could have done so much with this exhibition. This museum is a multimillion-dollar project, there should have been a narrative giving a collective account of the Namibian ex political prisoners that were imprisoned on Robben Island’s experience. Interviews should have been played next to their portraits, more should have been done. The way the exhibition is set up is it does not make it seem like the Namibians that were imprisoned on Robben Island are part of the broader Namibian history narrative but more like they were just passing by, in the liberation struggle.

However; The Namibian government has recognised Namibians that were imprisoned on Robben Island by according some of them that have passed on with Heroes status and allowing them burial rights at the Heroes Acre in Namibia, the late John Otto Nankudhu and Gerson Hitjevi Veii are both buried at the Heroes Acre. The Heroes Acre is Namibia’s country's national war memorial. Namibian cabinet directed that the tombstones of Namibians who were buried in Cape Town after they passed on while they were imprisoned on Robben Island, this prisoners were buried in Guguletu a township in Cape Town and should be returned back to Namibia and given a Heroes burial.

http://www.lelamobile.com/content/48735/Veii-is-first-non-Swapo-member-to-be-buried-at-Heroes-Acre/
Image from the Namibian Independence Museum
What has Robben Island museum done?

For many years Robben Island has associated the museum narrative around Nelson Mandela, this was done to give the South African people a hero and rebuild the moral of the people. However, in so doing, it is believed that the Robben Island museum has neglected to give a broader narrative of Robben Island and all the people that have passed through it, in particular to the Namibian ex political prisoners.

When you dock on Robben Island you have to walk a few meters and at the end tourists are instructed to get on to buses that are waiting to take them on a tour of Robben Island. However, on the walk to the buses there are pictures of ex political prisoners on a long stretch of wall. On this wall you will see pictures of different reference groups and on the pictures there are captions. There is a picture of Nelson Mandela, a picture of Toivo ya Toiva, and other South African political leaders. However, with the expectation that the tour will take you to the D-section were most of the Namibian ex political prisons where kept, on the other hand if you ask to see D-section the tour guide will gladly oblige and take your group to D-section. The exhibition in D-section includes all the names of the Namibians that were imprisoned on Robben Island, the first group and then other Namibians that joined at a later stage and pictures of the reference groups. (Inset of D-section Exhibition)

Makana Trust

The Makana Trust was established in 1996 following a suggestion that was made when the B-section reference group met at Robben Island, the reason Robben Island museum set up this reference groups was to interview political prisoners that were kept in the same section. B-section was the leaders section, this meant that the likes of former president Nelson Mandela, Toivo ya Toivo were present. Nelson Mandela, come up with an idea to start an ex political prisoners fund, to help ex-Robben Island political prisoner and their dependants in by improving their educational, social, health, economic and basic human needs and well being and assist them in finding their feet financially in the new democratic order. This was inclusive to Namibian Robben Island ex political prisoners; the trust is called the Makana Trust. “The Namibia Robben Island ex political prisoners did not gain at all from this trust, [however] some South African political prisoners also did not benefit from this trust only a
few were able to enjoy the fruits of the Makana Trust”.

**Namibian Trust**

The Robben Island Veterans Trust Fund Namibia was launched as a way of recognising Namibians that were jailed on Robben Island alongside their South African comrades between the 1960s and mid-1980s. Toivo ya Toivo is the chairperson of the Namibian-Robben Island Veterans Trust Fund, the fund was established in order to help Namibian ex political prisoners and their families financially.

The 61 Namibians who were incarcerated in the notorious prison, 21 have since passed on, 14 of the 61 are either currently serving the Namibian society in different capacities - ranging from ministers to farmers - and the remaining 26 are said to be in dire need of shelter, food and clothing. Most of this ex political prisoners are old people and therefore need assistance, at the official launch dinner the trust received N$117 000 in donations.

"We have gone through one of the most brutal experience in the history of mankind, but did not use it to take revenge; it has been an experience that would teach us and our children the bad things which should be avoided in the future."

Most ex political prisoners that were imprisoned on Robben Island have exhibited immeasurable strength and the ability to forgive. However this does not suggest that they wish to be forgotten and treated as outlaws from their societies but rather want to be integrated in to their societies and also share equally in the wealth of their countries.

**Critically Analysing the Oral history interviews with three ex political prisoners**

Toivo ya Toiva was the Namibian Leader and founder of the Ovambo Peoples Organisation (OPO) and this political party is deemed to have lead Namibia to its independence. More so, when I interviewed Mr. Toivo ya Toivo, about his stay on Robben Island he was very keen to talk about that time of his life, but when confronted with questions that would take a side in making Robben Island and the Namibian government put in a certain position than, he either

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351 Toivo ya Toivo, Oral Interview (Namibia), September 2015
352 David Moisi, guest speaker at the launching of the Trust, South African ex-Robben Island prisoner. Government Gazette
refused to answer the questions. Portelli talks briefly about this as the dual authorship; the interviewer has his own agenda and the interviewee also has their own agenda. In the case of Toivo ya Toivo, it could have been a power struggle, he might have had feelings of disappointment by being interviewed by a young person, secondly he could have felt that I had not done my research before conducting the interview. This are some of the answers he gave; “Hm uhm uhm, I have no idea, I was there serving my country and my people, and eh whether the government has done enough or not that is not my thing it’s for you people to decide.” This could mean a lot, but the way I translate it, is that he is in agreement with my question, but does not want to talk against the dominate ideology that is that is the current government.

Another thing I observed is that I did interview in English, but some of the responses to the questions where in English and Oshivambo. All the ex political prisoners I interview all have Oshivambo as a first language and English as a second language. This meant that some of the transcribing had to be fist done in the vernacular and then translated into English, through this process there is a lot of essence of the interview that is lost.

The Language used by some of the ex political prisoners that I interviewed was, used as a form of taking back power and control. The interviewee might have felt that, why should he respond to my questions in English when I understand Oshivambo. However, another way of looking at this is; perhaps he was more comfortable speaking his own language instead of that was brought into the country by the colonial power. Onselen, talks about languages as being produced through history, and have their own characteristics, every language is different in expressions, with political and social interactions.

“Giving voice to the previously silenced” is a concept that is believed to bring to light histories that have been silenced and the oral interview can be used to bring about these new aspects of history into light. The way I am using this notion of silence in trying to understand

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353 Alessandro Portelli, ‘The oral history interview’, available on archive.org/details/oral_History_Interview_Portelli
354 Toivo ya Toivo, Oral Interview (Namibia), September 2015
my interview subjects, by reading into what they are not saying but trying to understand the silences of what is being said and not said.

**Conclusion**

The research aimed at studying the History of the Namibian experience on Robben Island and what measures were taken to document their experience with an insight into the Namibian colonial history. In this paper I have attempted to argue that a site like Robben Island with such an extensive considerable historical environment, where torment took place, it is important to show all aspects of Robben Island prison, in particular to the documenting of Namibian ex political prisoners.

Robben Island museum and the Namibian government over the years have failed to properly document the experience of the Namibian ex political prisoners. Robben Island museum has shown no interest in the Namibian nation building policy and projects. The Namibian government needs all its historical aspect in assisting in the Nation building projects. South Africa (Robben Island in particular) has always had a unique relationship to Namibia.

The Mayibuye archive has a huge Namibian collection of interviews that was conducted as part of the Robben Island museums research project. Robben Island has enough research on the Namibian ex political prisoners to make them part of the main Robben Island museum narrative. In this paper I attempt to express that the Namibian narrative should be elevated both on Robben Island and in Namibia.

In the fight to make information and education always available, policies are very much influenced by the dominant ideology and therefore awareness is important in this work. In order to achieve this, the research is about the various moments and Namibian people who passed through Robben Island and which gives me an insight into the Namibian colonial history.

Lastly in this work I have talked about the initiative Robben Island museum has taken to insure that the Namibian narrative is included in the Robben Island story by having an exhibition in the D-section.
However, should this work reach the policy makers, and erect the type of necessary dialogue, I hope it brings about debates and conversations for better change and to continue research on this topic.

**Challenges**

The topic I tackled with this research paper has never been done before, so there was not enough literature that I could review, the principal challenge of this research is that there are no academic records or written arguments on the documentation of the Namibians that were imprisoned on Robben Island.

Information was insufficient, that hindered with the writing of this paper. The Namibia ex political prisoners that were imprisoned on Robben Island are not well documented therefore, most of the reference I use in this work is from previous interviews that Robben Island had carried out, and interviews that I conducted in Namibia with a three ex political prisoners. The information gathered through interviewing the three ex political prisoners was not sufficient, the information that I had planned to retrieve from the interviews is not what I had received.

There is a great need to do extensive research on the lives of Namibian ex political prisoners that were imprisoned on Robben Island, and the circumstances around their arrest and being incarcerated in another country. It’s imperative that more detailed information is collected and produced for the Namibian communities.

**Recommendations**

This paper shows that there is a need to set up a Robben Island Museum in Namibia, therefore this paper recommends that Robben Island assists the Namibian ex political prisoners in setting up the Museum. Robben Island has ex political prisoners as prison guides; this paper recommends that Robben Island hires a Namibian ex political prisoner to be a guide in the D-section. In so doing Robben Island will be eradicating some of the challenges that Namibian ex political prisoners face.

The Namibian government should invest in research of the Namibians that were imprisoned on Robben Island. Most of the ex political prisoners are old; there is a big possibility that information will be lost, should the Namibian government wait any longer. Making funds
available for this kind of research (for both Robben Island and the Namibian government) will be a step in eradicating poverty, providing employment and equal rights for all Namibians.
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ROBBEN ISLAND A PLACE OF COMMEMORATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY AND THE LIBERATION ACHIEVEMENT

BY

SINETHEMBA BUSA

ABSTRACT
This essay begins by giving a brief history of Robben Island in order to highlight the varying roles the Island has played and the various groups involved. Emphasizing the entire history of the Island is important, as what this essay will argue is that certain histories, memories, and meanings have been favoured over others. Hence we find that the history of imprisonment before apartheid is less valued and the focus is on the representation of Robben Island history that meets the standard of the new South Africa. What emerges is that Robben Island's history and the memories and meanings of political imprisonment associated with it extend far beyond the current emphasis on post-Apartheid South Africa celebrating its new democracy and a triumph over a dark past. The purpose is to illustrate how Robben Island's use as a symbol for the creation of a public and national meaning and identity threatens to ignore and ultimately lose a multitude of collective meanings and memories of imprisonment way before Robben Island became a maximum security prison.

In working towards obtaining an answer for this question I had use written sources such as books, journal articles, publications, student research papers, Robben Island special collection Books such as the ones written by Harriet Deacon, Barbara Hutton, Charlene Smith and Nigel Penn. I also conducted one interview with the ex-political prisoners who were incarcerated on Robben Island during the apartheid times. What I had discovered during my research is that Robben Island imprisonment timeline dates back to the early imprisonment of slaves and prisoners of war from the East Indies. However, the most crucial and mostly represented memory of imprisonment is the apartheid period, this is all due to the fact that the Post-apartheid narrative of Robben Island is associated with its significance as a national historical and heritage site with a victorious and liberation past. This all serves to meet the social standard of post-apartheid South Africa.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
Robben Island is a place of commemoration of South African history and the liberation achievement. It is post-apartheid narrative that promotes democratization and fostering reconciliation and national unity. The problem arises when its post-apartheid narrative tends to focus largely on the latest imprisonment of apartheid ex-political prisoners, yes this is due to the fact that our great leaders such as Nelson Mandela who spent 18 years of his life on the Island as a political prisoner opposing apartheid and fighting for freedom, however my main interest is to explore the timeline of imprisonment on what is now called a South African Heritage site. By doing this I argue that the representation and centralizing the Robben Island’s collective memory of imprisonment only to apartheid imprisonment, devalues authentic history of this site imprisonment timeline and how it became a political prison. Robben Island and its meaning have become a significant part of post-apartheid identity building in South Africa and as a result have been reshaped. This reshaping as a consequence of the politicizing and co modifying of Robben Island is collapsing its multiple memories and meanings into a single dominant narrative of a new South Africa as a whole.

How was Robben Island selected as a site for political imprisonment, not only during apartheid but before apartheid period of imprisonment? This whole research is motivated by this question, as much as the answer would seem know and simple to find but the core of this question further includes an investigation of why other memories of this site would be suppressed and not being included in the post-apartheid South African narrative, furthermore if a place is rich in history or its kind (imprisonment) in the case of Robben Island, it should all be conserved and passed on to the next generation so to educate the youth and the next generation not only of the collective memory that we all read but with the authentic history of this site and not the selected history that is meant to suit the standard of the post-apartheid South Africa. As much as there is power relation in how past memory should be represented, there is also a need to include the provenance of the authentic memories of imprisonment on Robben Island for the benefit of future generations and for preservation of authentic history.
AIM OF RESEARCH
The aim of this research was to explore how Robben Island was selected as a site for political imprisonment, not only during apartheid but even before apartheid period of imprisonment, also to understand the provenance of imprisonment and to collect information about the corresponding dates of imprisonment from the earliest centuries when Robben Island was used as a place of banishment, dating back from the Dutch rule (1652-1806) to British rule (1795-1803) to when segregation and discrimination started in South Africa long before the national party namely ANC came to power in 1948. Objectively I’m interested in developing the accuracy of the imprisonment timeline on Robben Island.

Developing a sense of understanding why are other memories of Robben Island imprisonment are favoured and included in the South African post-apartheid narrative. Another aim was to show how significant the memory of the past is and should be preserved for future use. Furthermore, when memory is selected and reshaped it loses its authenticity and so the next generation might get diluted history of their ancestral past. Also to measure the biasness of memory representation as most of early Robben Island imprisonment memory is given less attention and focal point being the apartheid political imprisonment.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW:
Robben Island had long been associated with brutality, cruelty, inhuman activities which were specially designed for the detention, punishment and imprisonment of political prisoners, not only from South Africa but also from different parts of the world. This site holds a very deep diverse history of human kind, but it will be always marked by the fact that it was selected as a site for political imprisonment. My main interest is how exactly did this Island start and continue to be a place for political imprisonment until 1996. The richness of the history of the Robben Island in a political context draws my attention as to how this beautiful land could be a place where our ex political prisoners suffered for the better future of South Africa.

Now that Robben Island was declared as a museum, the significance of history of imprisonment before apartheid has less importance to the public, however imprisonment timeline gives a clear view of how was this site made a political imprisonment from the Dutch rule (1652-1806) to British rule (1795-1803) to when segregation and discrimination
started in South Africa long before the national party namely ANC came to power in 1948. Objectively I’m interested in developing the accuracy of the imprisonment timeline on Robben Island. As much as the literature would have an answer, it is my duty to retrieve and analyze and dig more information relevant to the theme of my research.

What emerges is that Robben Island's history and the memories and meanings of political imprisonment associated with it extend far beyond the current emphasis on post-Apartheid South Africa celebrating its new democracy and a triumph over a dark past. The purpose is to illustrate how Robben Island's use as a symbol for the creation of a public and national meaning and identity threatens to ignore and ultimately lose a multitude of collective meanings and memories of imprisonment way before Robben Island became a maximum security prison.\(^\text{358}\) As early as 1525 a Portuguese ship is said to have left prisoners on the Island. In 1615 the English East India Company sent about ten convicted men in Robben Island. However, one of the earliest Dutch settlers, Jan Van Riebeeck banished the first political prisoner there, this prisoner was called Autshumato and his suspected crime was cattle theft. Under VOC rule it was evident that religious leaders from the East Indies were also banished on this Island, without forgetting to mention that the literature reveals that these included the Princes of Macassar and Madura; as well as the Muslim leaders such as Hdje Mattarm who would always be remembered by their shrine that is still on the Island even today.\(^\text{359}\)

In exactly 1738, Regent Doumano of Termanos was banished to the Cape for being ‘dangerous’ and a disturber of the peace’, together with four minor kings were incarcerated for life in prison. In 1747, the Dutch rulers in Indonesia sent Said Alowi of Mocha, a Muslim priest into exile on the Island. This is a short brief history of imprisonment on the Island before the British rule, this brief history locates the earliest beginning of the use of Robben Island as a site for imprisonment. Since then Robben Island continued to be the site for imprisonment, not only it was a site for imprisonment during the Dutch but continued even during the British rule, for an example during the years of the British occupation numerous political leaders were sent to the Island, including Khoikhoi leader David Stuurman; chief


Mqaoma; Koranna leaders after the Koranna wars; Chief Langalibalele and many others. In 1819 Makana was banished there for leading an attack on Grahams town.\textsuperscript{360}

In 1846, however the prison on Robben Island was closed and the prisoners were sent to do hard labour in mainland convicts stations. In the old prison buildings, the colonial government set up a hospital, called the general infirmary for many years, which was divided into three sections, housing ‘chronic sick’ ‘lunatics’ and ‘lepers. These three institutions closed in 1891, 1921 and 1931 respectively. As much as the Island acted as a hospital, it accommodated a small number of small political prisoners, mainly from the eastern and northern frontiers of the colony.\textsuperscript{361} After the lepers left the Island in 1931, the Island was left empty until the outbreak of world war two in 1939, then after in 1959, however it was decided that the Island should be taken over by the prisons department. From 1961 to 1991 the Island accommodated a maximum security prison, housing those political prisoners considered most threatening to the stability of the apartheid government. Among the very first prisoners to be sent there in 1962 was Nelson Mandela, George Peake, a member of the Cape City Council. Until 1991 when the last political prisoners left the Island, several thousand political prisoners had served their sentenced there, some died there.\textsuperscript{362}

Robben Island as a site for political imprisonment is mostly valued within the context of it as an apartheid maximum security prison where our liberation leaders like Nelson Mandela were incarcerated. Yes, this site was of evil practices and social isolation or exclusion was one of the motivations that drove the apartheid authorities to keep these political prisoners there. Now as the above literature reveals the exact dates of the beginning of the imprisonment, it is evident that new South Africa chose to exclude the representation of colonial history of imprisonment on the Island and only bring up the apartheid history of imprisonment to the public.

By the little understanding that I had obtained from the literature written about how this site became a political prison, I would argue and say from the colonizers eyes and during the period of cruelty and evilness within them, they saw the Island a far place from the mainland and the natives had no boats nor any form of transport that could be used to reach the Island,

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the Dutch rulers taught the Island was a better place for their brutal actions. Furthermore, because this site was not even close to be seen from a distance, imprisonment was possible and the escape of prisoners would be impossible, although Autshumato did escape the following year after his imprisonment. The British knew exactly what the Dutch used the Island for, without the use of it as the source of food, the British had information of how the Dutch used the Island for slavery and imprisonment, and so they did the same, they used it as a military prison in 1807.363

When the site was handed over to prisons department in 1959, the apartheid government already knew how significant the site would be for banishment of our ex political prisoners. And so this is exactly how this Island historically became a political prison, let alone the fact that it was later made a maximum security prison. Timeline analysis of imprisonment on Robben Island creates a chronological order that leads to how one can get to understand how exactly this Island became a site for political imprisonment not only during apartheid but even before.364 Robben Island should not only be looked at, as political prison that had only accommodated apartheid political prisoners like Nelson Mandela, because imprisonment on this Island started way before 1959. The timeline on the literature review on this paper brings us close to identifying how this site was selected as a prison for political prisoners.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
My main interest is how exactly this Island started and continued to be a place for political imprisonment. The core question of this paper and the motive to dig for an answer is how memories of Robben Island imprisonment are represented and how biased these representations are.

This was the most crucial part of this research simply because without any method of data collection, this paper wouldn’t be a success. In Social Science we use either qualitative or quantitative research methods. I used primary sources such as books, journal articles, internet sources, research papers. I acquired historical information about the Island and this historical background helped me to shape my paper in a chronological manner and to engage broadly in

the debate raised by different theorist about imprisonment on the Island. However, I couldn’t only on the primary sources alone, I thought that at least one interview would be essential for this research as it would help me to have a broader information about an experience and memory of apartheid imprisonment on the Island. I had conducted a 30-minute interview at Nelson Mandela Gateway with a Robben Island ex-political prisoner by the name, Vuyisile Vincent Diba who shared his time to help me get the information about his memory and experience of being imprisoned on Robben Island. Interviews are good to use in order to obtain information from the victims of historical events that were traumatic or to recover the untouched realities of their past.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS
In this chapter I will be showing the results of what information I had obtained from doing my research and from the sources that was using, my results may not be adequately presented but you will get the sense of the imprisonment timeline that will show that imprisonment on the Island started way before apartheid period. However, as I would try and show the chronological timeline of Robben Island imprisonment, I want to prove that even though the Island had been used for various reasons, from the early centuries to its recent use as a post-apartheid Museum and a heritage site, so many memories had not been included in its present narrative, it will always be remembered as a prison for ex-political prisoners.

As early as 1525 a Portuguese ship is said to have left prisoners on the Island. In 1615 the English East India Company sent about ten convicted men in Robben Island. However, one of the earliest Dutch settlers, Jan Van Riebeeck banished the first political prisoner there, this prisoner was called Autshumato and his suspected crime was cattle theft. Under VOC rule it was evident that religious leaders from the East Indies were also banished on this Island, without forgetting to mention that the literature reveals that these included the Princes of Macassar and Madura; as well the Muslim leaders such as Hdje Mattarm who would always be remembered by their shrine that is still on the Island even today.\[365\]

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As early as March 1636, “Hendrik Brouwer, former Governor-general of the Dutch East Indies, banished to Robben Island the ringleaders of an attempted mutiny”. Colonial office banished some slaves and exiles to the Island to cut some stones under the supervision of the post holder Jan Van Wouterzen. Now in exactly 1658 Autshumato also known as Harry, who was a translator between Kohekohe and the Dutch, was trusted by Jan Van Riebeeck but later fell into obscurity and was placed at the Robben Island. He was the First political prisoner together with two other Khoikhoi captives. Autshumato escaped with his fellow Khoikhoi captive in 1659. In 1669 Krotoa also known as Eva, niece of Autshumato who was also a fluent translator got banished on Robben Island. The need for hard labour was slowly increasing and people were banished on the Island as they had to work with lime and slate. So from 1665-69 people from the mainland were continually banished on the Island.

Following this period in 1672 five people were banished on the Island because they were found guilty of attacking a shepherd but just like Autshumato they managed to escape the following year. From 1682 onwards, the Dutch East India Company also banished prisoners and opponents to their rule to Robben Island. As the history books say, the first was a prince from Macassar. After this period, many well-known Muslim Leaders were exiled to the Island. To show that this Island’s imprisonment history is rich and began long before apartheid rule was constructed. This gives me a clearer understanding of the chronological order of imprisonment and this revealed that it was because this site had a very long history of imprisonment hence it became a site for political imprisonment during apartheid. This was all because the apartheid government knew the history of imprisonment on the Island and they knew that the site was good for banishment. Hence they saw it as a space that could accommodate common law prisoners and the political prisoners that were on Section-B the maximum security prison were Mandela and other well-known politicians were imprisoned.

In 1960 a convict, Jan Rykman was the first person who escaped on the Island by swimming, he had never used any boat. He reached the mainland alive. To show that his is a very long history of imprisonment and these memories are not represented on the RIM narrative today. In 1728 the ‘Bandieten Roll” stated that there were forty-two prisoners whom 26 were termed

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to be Europeans and 16 Indianan were incarcerated on Robben Island. In 1742 prince of Madura was also banished on the Island but unfortunately he passed away and his body was returned in his country of origin in 1744. In 1744 two Muslim men who are described as “holy men” by the names, Akloeurie and Hadje Mattarm, were banished on the Island, but in 1745 Hadje Mattar passed away on the Island. There are assumptions that this person could be the same person as Abdul Mattara, whose Kramat is on Robben Island.  

As time and year progresses in South Africa, this site continued to be a place of banishment and imprisonment. In 1749-51 Daing Mangenam, prince of Macassar, was banished on this Island. In “1751 a rebellion was attempted but the leaders were caught. In 1761 Bandieten Roll give a number of 70 prisoners and 46 were Indianan and 24 Europeans, so meaning now this Island was obviously continually being used as a site of banishment. In 1773 Mohammedan Priest and other noble beings were from the East and were sent to the Island for imprisonment. By 1789 the estimated number of prisoners on Robben Island was 134. In 1794 The Dutch East Indian Company went bankrupt and lost control of the colony, that’s when the British Military prison in 1806 occupied the Cape for the second time. After this period, Robben Island was now not used as a prison because the British Authority had sent all the prisoners to Amsterdam prison.

In 1807 it continued to be a prison because of its attachment with banishment and imprisonment. This continued from 1807 to 1945, between this period even women were incarcerated on the Island. In 1948 the continuation of colonial and racial oppression the National party came to power and institutionalized the policy of the global know South African apartheid system. In 1955 apartheid gave rise to movement calling for democracy and non-racialism. In 1960 Robben Island came to be under South African Prisons Service. Then in 1961 this site again opened as a prison for political prisoners. And it only contained 11 cells. This is exactly how this site became a site for political imprisonment for our ex-political prisoners.

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370 Interview with Vuyisile Vincent Diba (Robben Island ex-political prisoner) 1st October 2015.
However, my own interview with the ex-political prisoner Vuyisile Vincent Diba, there are apparent tension in his relating of his experience before his imprisonment and his period of being a political prisoner at Robben Island. His memory of the Apartheid system era before his imprisonment is shaped by violence of the apartheid system that almost changed his entire dreams of becoming a scholar due to his engagement in liberation movement that led to his expulsion at the University of Fort Hare in the year 1978 as he was precise.

In addition to the above mentioned, Diba shows strong respect for the time he spent on prison because he grew there as a politician and as an intellectual being. He further states that he felt as if God had plans for him during his period of incarceration, he obtains his bachelor’s degree in Social Work. He went on to say that it was a blessing in disguise that he had a change to spend time with the great leaders like Nelson Mandela and he also became an expert in early South African Political movements through awareness campaigns on the Island.

By analyzing the interview with Diba I got a sense that the triumph narrative of liberation heritage and particularly Robben Island Museum narrative are submissive representations that moderate the harshness of Robben Island experiences and instead focus on the positive aspects of these experiences. When it comes to the traumatic experience of the Island Diba sounded very sad on testifying the real torture they had experience on the Island and the treatment they got from food supply, extreme cold and harshness of the prison wardens who never really care about their feelings and who they really are as human beings.

The most touching part of his story was the fact that he couldn’t pay his last respect to his parents when they passed away. However, he had mentioned that all missing information can be found in his newly released book, “his autobiography. Even though he doesn’t have enough memory of the Robben Island use as a site of imprisonment, he then understands the fact that Robben Island would always be remembered as a site of imprisonment of ex-political prisoners like himself.

This is because of the collective memory that is narrated based on promotion of the post-apartheid democratic narrative. What I had learnt from this interview is the fact that even ex-political prisoners have only apartheid history of Robben Island indoctrinated in them by collective memory and this caused history of imprisonment on the Island to be centred on it.
being a place for political imprisonment and to a point of making Robben Island a site to commemorate Mandela’s imprisonment history.\textsuperscript{371}

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION
The timeline of imprisonment as illustrated in the above results is what is was essential to show how Robben Island became a site for political imprisonment from the time when Autshomato was banished on the Island with two other fellow Khoikhoi captives. This however, also shows me that even though this site had been under different custodianships it has still been used as a site of imprisonment and a place of banishment. This however shows that this chronological timeline of imprisonment represent the long history of this imprisonment and however even though memories of these long history are not included in the present day narratives, it doesn’t mean they do not exist and it simply means that some histories are diluted or silenced to meet the standards of post-apartheid South Africa and to make it even more interesting, the history of Robben Island will always be remembered as a site for apartheid political imprisonment and its narrative focus will be on apartheid period.

In clarifying what I was exactly looking to find in this paper was the clarity of imprisonment that it didn’t begin from 1961 after it was taken over from the department of defence by the South African prisons services but way before that. There are power relations in memory representations and this could cause the future generations to be misled by their own history, and if the authentic history and the provenance of the imprisonment on this Island is not preserved then future generation would lose their authentic ancestral past of imprisonment.

Conclusion
In conclusion, I had explored how was Robben Island selected as a site for political imprisonment, not only during apartheid but even before apartheid period of imprisonment, also showed understanding on the provenance of imprisonment and had collected information about the corresponding dates of imprisonment from the earliest centuries when Robben Island was used as a place of banishment, dating back from the Dutch rule to British rule to when segregation and discrimination started in South Africa. Objectively I was interested in developing the accuracy of the imprisonment timeline on Robben Island, also to

\textsuperscript{371}Interview with Vuyisile Vincent Diba (Robben Island ex-political prisoner) 1st October 2015.
show that there are power relations in memory representations and this could cause the future
generations to be confused by their own history, and if the authentic history and the
provenance of the imprisonment on this Island is not preserved then future generation would
lose their authentic ancestral past of imprisonment.

Bibliography
6. Interview with Vuyisile Vincent Diba (Robben Island ex-political prisoner) 1st October 2015.
THE ROLE OF SPORT IN BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND UNITY AMONG POLITICAL PRISONERS ON ROBBEN ISLAND: 1964 - 1976

BY

STANLEY TIKU

ABSTRACT:

By the end of 1964, hundreds of political prisoners had been shipped to Robben Island and placed alongside the common law prisoners previously held on the Island by the apartheid regime of South Africa. The paper establishes an overview of Robben Island as a prison and the challenges faced by ex-political prisoners in getting organized sports up and running on the Island. The paper establishes the subsequent role sport played in building confidence and unity among political prisoners in Robben Island giving the fact that the prisoners comes from different political orientation to share a common space. It further establishes how communication between the different politically oriented factions on the Island was improved and brought together through sport in fighting a common enemy. The paper goes further to discuss the ability of ex-political prisoners in resolving their sporting differences in a manner that the prison authorities took no notice of such problems that would have brought the sporting activities to a halt. Above all, the paper focuses its attention on the ability of the ex-political prisoners of Robben Island to use sport as a tool in building community unity and in shaping collective identities.
CHAPTER ONE
AN OVERVIEW OF ROBBEN ISLAND AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ORGANISED SPORT IN THE 1960s

Background
Robben Island is located in the Western Cape region of South Africa and is recognized as a place of outstanding universal value today. It is acknowledged for its great political symbolism as a place of selfless struggle and as a place signifying the triumph of the human spirit over great adversity. The Island is a space of memory with a rich and layered history going back ten thousand years. Its recorded memory and history of interaction with the outside world is said to have begun with the arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498. Its layered history ranging from maritime contacts, confinement and banishment, oppression and hard labor, torture, segregation and garrison, leprosarium and mental health facility, a prison for common law criminals and for political prisoners and of subsequent triumph. Its significant place in the world today is forged out of a long history of human habitation and use, in which the symbols of oppression and struggle against such oppression have been laid down repeatedly alongside each other.

Events that led to imprisonment
The South African black men and women saw in the 1950s the introduction of the passbooks soon to be known as the ‘dompas’ which bore all their personal details imposed on them and which had to be shown on request to any white civil servant, police officer, or government officials making the black men and women foreigners in their own country. It is therefore no surprise that the ‘dompas’ was much hated.

By the end of the Second World War, history recorded more blacks than whites living in South African cities. Many whites found this as a development that would see the complete domination of the urban areas by the blacks. They developed a strategy to counter what they described as ‘black danger’. Yes, discrimination has been in existence in South Africa before 1948, but from this year onwards, it became constitutional. The belief that was upheld was that white people were superior to the blacks and therefore their uniqueness needed to be protected. Laws were passed forbidding interracial sex and mixed marriages making them illegal. To separate races even further, schools, hospitals, universities and all public amenities were racially created and divided into white and non-white. The whites got the very best of
everything especially when it came to economic benefits such as jobs and land which up till date remain a major concern.

The apartheid government later introduced laws that saw the creation of the ‘Bantustans’ (homelands) with the intention of alleviating apartheid fears of black domination in the towns and cities. This led to more than three million people being forcibly evicted from their homes and banished to these small and lacking areas in resources to support the numbers living in them.\footnote{372} However, the white were so reliant on the non white labour that the government had to devise a way that would permit other races to continue working in towns and cities thus the introduction of the pass laws for blacks.

Robben Island most poignant period was the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when the facility was used as a maximum security prison for political prisoners of South Africa’s apartheid regime. Beginning in 1962, black, Indian, and mixed-race inmates were held here including, most famously, the late South African president Nelson Mandela. The small Island remains an indelible part of South Africa’s history as it held thousands of both political and common law prisoners during this period.\footnote{373} The Island was no pleasure resort. Instead it has served as a place of imprisonment, banishment and isolation for some four centuries – most notably housing the leaders of South Africa’s anti-apartheid movements.

In an attempt to defeat the liberation struggle, the apartheid regime created numerous laws that resulted in hundreds of Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), African National Congress (ANC), and the South African Communist Party (SACP) members being arrested, tried and sentenced to different periods of imprisonment. The apartheid regime moved swiftly to ban organizations opposed to it and introduced legislation that outlawed even discussions of opposition to the state through armed struggle. By the end of 1964, hundreds of political prisoners had been shipped to Robben Island and placed alongside the common law prisoners previously held on the Island.\footnote{374} This paper seeks to examine the role of sport in building confidence and unity among political prisoners in Robben Island giving the fact that the prisoners comes from different political orientation to share a common space.

\footnote{372} Chuck Korr and Marvin Close, \textit{More than just a Game, Soccer V Apartheid}. 2008. 6
\footnote{373} F Buntman, \textit{Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid} (Cape Town: Cambridge university press, 2003). p32
\footnote{374} ibid.p35
The research project aims at examining the challenges political prisoners faced in attempting to get organized sport up and running in Robben Island. But most importantly the research paper will focus its attention on how eventually sport brought hope, confidence and above all fostered the unity that was to be experienced among political prisoners in Robben Island.

A lot of scholarly works have been done with regards to Robben Island and the incarceration of political prisoners on the Island. Memoirs by ex-political prisoners, autobiographies and different literatures have been written within the time frame of my research with little emphasis on the role of sport in building confidence and unity among political prisoners on the Island. This provides space for research in this area that will further help us understand the skills exhibited by political prisoners during the subsequent years that followed their imprisonment.

The years after the introduction of the maximum prison for political prisoners on Robben Island by the apartheid regime in South Africa caught the attention of scholars home and abroad. Interviews, articles, journals, books have been published to expose the inhumane treatment and the struggle for survival by political prisoners in Robben Island.

Chuck Korr and Marvin Close narrated an interesting account of how the political prisoners of South Africa’s infamous Robben Island turned soccer into an active force in their struggle for freedom. Despite torture, regular beatings and backbreaking labor, these extraordinary men defied all odds and played organized league soccer in one of the ugliest and most dreadful prisons on earth. Even more astonishingly, they played the game for nearly 20 years with strict adherence to FIFA rules$^{375}$. They focused much their attention on how sport was organized in the Island and more particularly those that stood up for the right to play sport on the Island from the prison authorities. This amazing story that celebrates bravery and heroism will be resourceful in this research. Perhaps their work remains one of few that handle sports on the Island in a more detailed manner.

Indres Naidoo’s *Island in Chains* narrates his ten years’ experience on Robben Island up until the time as he puts it ‘the chains were loosened’, they were free. Through the eyes of Naidoo,

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we are brought closer to the harsh condition in which the political prisoners experienced. It
also accounts on how conditions later improved. He attempts an explanation on how they
survived these conditions and how they formed a community with one another despite a
number of differences\(^{376}\). His work will provide valuable contribution to this research paper
as we are drawn closer to the reality of what it really meant to be on Robben Island during the
years mentioned. It will certainly wet our appetite into understanding how sport was to
change the mind set of political prisoners who were almost at a state of emergency.

*There and Back, Robben Island 1964 -1979* is the autobiography of Eddie Daniels who was
born in District Six in 1928. Because of his opposition to apartheid as a member of the
Liberal Party of South Africa and African Resistance Movement he was banned, detained,
imprisoned and banned again. Facing a possible death penalty, he refused to be witness for
the state or give undertakings to two Supreme Court judges who were prepared to negotiate
with the national government for his release from prison.

He served his sentence of fifteen years on Robben Island in B section in the company of
Mandela, Sisulu and Kathrada and other leaders. Three years and eight months after his
release from prison, after the lifting of his banning orders, he and Eleanor married in defiance
of immorality and mixed marriages acts. After those cruel laws were expunged from the legal
status books, they remarried and today they live in Summerset West near Cape Town.\(^ {377} \)
Not much written on sports but his work is of immense importance to this research as it provides
valuable insight into the apartheid system.

In *Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid*, Buntman reconstructs the inmate’s
resistance strategies to show how these men created a political and social order behind bars.
Survival was their first goal; challenging apartheid was their true aim. So although Robben
Island was designed to repress, it was continually transformed by its political inmates into a
site of resistance. The book theorizes that, where material conditions permit, the most far
reaching and effective forms of resistance involved constructive political action which seeks
to remake existing power relationships. This theory is demonstrated in three focuses of the
book: the activism of Robben Island, the effects of political prisoner resistance on the

\(^{376}\) I Naidoo, *Island in chains: ten years on Robben Island*. (South Africa: penguin books,2000)
\(^{377}\) E Daniels, *There and Back: Robben Island* (Mayibuye books-UWC)
apartheid state machinery, and in comparative cases which illustrate various international instances of political prisoners shaping both prisons and political orders.\textsuperscript{378}

The 1960s saw political prisoners in one of the most dreadful prisons on earth rose to their feet as they demanded from the prison authorities the right to play sport. After years of demand and negotiations, political prisoners were finally granted the right to play sport. During our first visit to the UWC/ Robben Island Mayibuye archives as a class, we were introduced to several collections including the sports collection. This visit sparked my quest in to why the political prisoners of the most horrific Island prison stood their grounds for organized sports considering the conditions under which they were subjected to. Most strikingly the sports records that I went through were kept with attention to every detail. My working with the sports collection during my internship really blew me away especially as I went through constitutions, minutes, receipt, correspondence, appeals, just to name a few indicating how seriously the men in prison viewed sports both as a community and as individuals. Sports soon became the vehicle to unification and above all it lifted the confidence level of the political prisoners that they can run the affairs of the country whenever the opportunity presented itself.

\textsuperscript{378} F Buntman, \textit{Robben Island and prisoner resistance to apartheid} (Cape Town: Cambridge university press, 2003)
CHAPTER TWO
SPORTS AS A VEHICLE FOR UNIFICATION

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. Sport can awaken hope where there was previously only despair. Sport speaks to people in a language they can understand.” Nelson Mandela

Sport incorporates all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. These include; casual or competitive sport and indigenous sports or game. Sport contributes to community identity, serving as a focal point for engagement, pride, and achievement. The diversity of sports and sporting activities (including social sport and physical recreation) offers the potential to reach men and women from every age-group, culture, and socio-economic background. The community benefits of sport go beyond the personal benefits derived from sports participation. Sport is a popular focal point for strategies that underpin government policy for community development and social inclusion. This was seen manifest in South Africa before and after the defeat of apartheid. The ex-political prisoners to date still exhibit the skills gained in their participation in sporting activities on Robben Island, holding different leading positions in government. A key example is the current President of South Africa Mr. Jacob Zuma who was the captain and defender of Rangers a soccer club of the Makana Football Association.

Because sports can offer such a diverse set of experiences, there is bound to be something that will appeal to almost everyone. Therefore, sports programs have the potential to attract a cross-section of the community, making the sport environment an effective way of building social networks, particularly at the neighborhood level. As a result, community cohesion and resilience was strengthened among political prisoners on the Island. Many people enjoy playing sports, but possibly even more people enjoy watching sports. Watching sports can bring people together, strengthen friendships, motivate people to be active, and you could even learn from it. Robben Island sport did not only appeal to the political prisoners but also the prison guards as well. This was evidently manifested in the Robben Island community as sport and recreation serve as a catalyst for community gatherings, bringing people together.

379 Definition of sport according to the International Platform on Sport and Development
for play, talk and shared experiences. Importantly, Robben Island sport created a positive effect providing an important thread that tied the community’s social fabric.

Within the Robben Island community, sports clubs sustain community interaction; bringing people together to boost confidence through galvanizing political prisoners in their times of need. Understanding this tempted me to narrow down sports into four main themes.

1. Sports teaches life skills
2. Sports teaches character
3. Sports provides a family
4. Sports provides an emotional escape

The role of sport in building confidence and unity among political prisoners in Robben Island therefore, cannot be overemphasized as it played a great role in the unique journey to freedom and democracy to the nation of South Africa. Unknown to the majority of South Africans, on Robben Island, during Apartheid, sport was a vehicle to unite people, to stress and promote values of respect and fair play, to show integrity, dignity, respect for the opponent and triumph as a team. The role of sports particularly football in the lives of the Robben Island prisoners can hardly be estimated today. In the 60s and 70s for example many post apartheid leaders of South Africa were instrumental in the creation of Robben Island’s Makana Football Association. The year 1972 also saw the first Summer Games on Robben Island. Their involvement in sport helped the prisoners to stay strong; to take back some control over their lives, to retain their identities, develop a sense of community, and strengthen values and character for all that participated and watched.

According to the Robben Island sport records, sport was very successful even in that potentially hostile environment because it was taken seriously and it was thanks to die hearted people like Mark Shinners, Sedick Issacs, Anthony Suze, Lizo Sitoto, Marcus Solomon, Dikgang Moseneke, Freddie Simon, Harry Gwala to name a few. These men gave their all and risk their lives to ensuring the wellbeing of political prisoners in their pursued for sport to be allowed on Robben Island by prison authorities. As I went through the sport

380 Interview with Mr. Vincent Diba, 06/10/2015
records during my internship with the Mayibuye archives I found that Robben Island sport was indeed successful as a result of the following:

1) It was organized around structures such as clubs, federations and leagues;
2) Each of these structures had a constitution which defined the purpose of the institution, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the various office bearers;
3) An effective administrative system was put in place;
4) Record-keeping was outstanding (as can be seen, for example, in the minutes of meetings);
and
5) Leaders were held accountable.

What is remarkable is that the prisoners managed to achieve this within the context of the hard and often brutal conditions that they found themselves in, and in the absence of the infrastructure and resources that are so freely available to present day sports organizations. The formation of the Makana Football Association (MFA) and how it organized itself to execute its functions was one big breakthrough on the Island. The different competing clubs that emerged particularly the Manong Football Club brought in an entirely new freedom of thinking on the Island as it included members from different political backgrounds who played together giving room for shared experience and fostering the unity that was soon experienced.

The Atlantic Raiders Affairs was particularly interesting, as it threatened the very existence of what the prisoners had worked hard to achieve and makes me go deeper into understanding the role of sport in building unity among political prisoners in Robben Island. The Atlantic Raiders affair forced Dikgang Moseneke to abandon his role as Chairman of the MFA to assume that of Appeals Tribunal Prosecutor. To this day it is asserted, Dikgang’s comrades take pleasure in reminding the Deputy Chief Justice of the Constitutional court of South Africa that the Atlantic Raiders presented him with his first opportunity to write a detailed legal brief. He put forward a strong case and ensured that the court focused on the specifics of what had happened, giving a close reading of the relevant provisions in the constitution of the MFA.381 This disagreement that threatened the existence of sport on the Island was resolved without the knowledge of the prison authorities. This alone speaks into how far the political

prisoners have come to understanding that their enemy was not a fellow prisoner but the system as goes a long to justify the role of sport in fostering unity among political prisoners.

For years, political prisoners on Robben Island demanded the right to play soccer. It was not an easy journey for them to get sports especially soccer up and running on Robben Island. A philosophy of excellence is applied to every task, no matter how brutalizing: the prisoners take pride in building the most escape-proof prison they can. The prisoners played with the prison laws to their favor. The right to complain was enshrined within Southern Africa’s prison regulations and had to be seen to be enforced regularly at prisons throughout the country and the apartheid regime took pride in following rules and regulations and was keen to give the impression internationally that it was respecting due legal process. What should be made known here is that they had no official obligation to actually act upon any of the complaints raised by political prisoners. The warders were infuriated by the prisoners’ demand. The terrorists were not on the Island to play sport and enjoy, they were there to be punished through hard labour and intimidation. The prisoners opted to take turns in their request to play sport and the first to take the chance was Tony. This resulted to his ticket taken from him, an indication that he was to be given no food for the following weekend. This was to be the form of reprisals the authorities would take in months to come.

But despite the punishment the prisoners received week on week, they continued to show resolve and unity. The prisoners in each cell were determined among themselves who would make such request on each occasion in the full knowledge that whoever would be put on a spare diet for two days and they were all keen to participate. And ultimately there comes the realization that there is humanity to be reclaimed in sharing a love for sport and fair play. The seeds of sports are sewn. It is not an easy journey. Shinners’ request for soccer to be allowed on the Island is a war of attrition, and Sedick Isaacs must apply the strict disciplines of his highly trained mind to his mission of spreading sport throughout the prison community. But at last the authorities relent, and informal soccer kicks off on Robben Island. But recreation is only half the aim. To the prisoners, all steeped in the ethos of debate, dialogue and negotiation, it is not only essential that sport takes place, but that it is seen to take place in a well ordered and highly structured manner.
Eventually prison authorities relented under pressure from the International Red Cross. They relented under the impression the men were physically too weak and undisciplined to organize and play sport as such it would last little less than two weeks. But if they proved otherwise, the regime was to hit them hard if they see that sports were to mean that much to the prisoners. What should be noted is the unity of the political prisoners from different political affiliation in fighting a common enemy. Together they pursued the campaign and won the concession from the prison regime. In this, they had recaptured a sense of self determination and they have come to the realization that in pressing for other rights unanimously. Political prisoners through this had also grown in confidence in negotiating with the prison warders.

The Makana Football Association was established in 1966, and played off and (mostly) on until the prison closed in 1991. The league was operated in three divisions - A, B and C, based on players' abilities - complete with trainers, managers, referees and coaches from the prison population of as many as 1,400 men. The league had several standing committees to deal with a range of issues, including discipline and maintenance. Minutes of meetings were kept. The level of detail was meticulous. Games were played for two hours on Saturdays for almost nine months a year. Sports on the whole was important on many levels for the prisoners: as a diversion from the harsh realities of their lives, as physical exercise to keep their minds and bodies sharp and as a way for those from differing political factions to work and play together.

The Makana Football Association was formed based on the principles of inclusivity. This saw the 16-year old Dikgang Moseneke elected Chairman, an act that underlines the Association’s commitment to excellence and a determination to maintain strict FIFA like technical rigor, rather than hierarchy, party politics and personality. The Association was a microcosm of democracy, a training ground not only for the body but for the political soul, where the principles of negotiation and dialogue were practiced and entrenched. It was literally the training ground for the leaders of the future. It is important to note here that before the concerted campaign to win the right to play soccer, members of the major political groups on the Island had been very much segregated from each other. They had different work gangs in the quarry, held separate seminars, greeted one another with different phrases and hand signals, and rarely co-operated but for the first time, as football was established, prisoners from the ANC (African National Congress), PAC (Pan African Congress) and other smaller
political formations begin to train together and play together in prison. One would not underestimate the role sports played in shaping and sustaining a spirit of resistance on the Island. In many respects, sports became the lifeline the political prisoners held on. Although there were some divisions on political lines when sport first became authorized on the Island in 1976, in general sport became a means of uniting people irrespective of their ideology or affiliation. Sports such as rugby were used to end the hostility that used to exist between the ANC and the PAC. Tshwete pointed that sports forged unity among political prisoners so that they could confront the prison authorities as one voice and not as different political entities.\footnote{Steve Tshwete, interview with Rachidi Molapo, tape recording, 25 November 1994, Cape Town, in Mayibuye Centre Archives.}

Some few days after the inaugural match that took place between Rangers and Bucks, representatives from various cell blocks met in the quarry to map out their manifesto. They established guidelines and each club was to elect its own president, secretary and officials. Committees were formed to oversee the running of each club and of the governing association itself. Within these structures, some of South Africa’s future leaders would learn how to organize, negotiate with and inspire the men around them.

At the initial stages, meetings were not of course, without problems. There were often tense, heated and most often hostile debates as suspicions on either side suggested that one political grouping or the other was attempting to wrest control of the association. Sport has presented another favorable ground for war as the seven clubs that were formed, Rangers, Bucks, Hotspurs, Dynamos, Ditshitshidi, Black Eagles and Gunners were created along party affiliation. But this was to be changed as the eight club Manong FC, was admitted to the association before the first season could begin led by Tony Suze. It was in fact the first club to select players irrespective of party affiliation and was conducted in an opened manner. On the page five of its constitution, Indiscrimination was enshrined as membership was opened to all persons. The indiscrimination embodies ordinary membership and membership to any part of the club an indication that the members of Manong FC would not be chosen along political lines. The founders defended their decision on the basis to break down the barriers between political factions and ensure the successful launch of the soccer league. But at the same time they stood the better chance of recruiting as a club the best players from the Island because of their open policy. It is therefore not surprising that throughout most of the
seasons, Manong FC remained at top flight of the league’s table. This was mind searching as political prisoners started coming to terms with the fact that to achieve what they were all fighting for, they needed to operate under a single umbrella.

The prisoners had also believed that they would be running their own country one day.\textsuperscript{383} That was partly why they organized the soccer league along strict FIFA rules. They saw it as a chance to prove they could run anything. Nelson Mandela, Robben Island’s most celebrated prisoner, along with his comrades such as Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and others, were among a small number of prisoners kept in isolation and who were barred from watching and participating in the soccer league. But they were kept informed with all the sporting activities and proceedings.

Some of South Africa’s politicians and leading figures in many aspects of the socio-economic and cultural milieu today, played soccer on Robben Island. This includes the former Minister of Defense ‘Terror’ Lekota, the Deputy Chief Justice of South Africa Dikgang Moseneke, ANC and president of the Republic of South Africa Jacob Zuma, business leader Tokyo Sexwale and many others.

All week, prisoners worked in the slate quarry in their drab prison garb. On Saturdays, when they played soccer, they wore uniforms in club colours such as maroon and white or black and silver. Initially when the prisoners were not allowed to play soccer, they would play secretly in their cells with balls made of pieces of string, paper, cardboard and rags. When soccer was finally allowed, the prisoners built their own goals. The league's building and maintenance committee rolled and level led a playing field. Training sessions were held mainly in the communal cell bathrooms- so as not to disturb other prisoners who were either relaxing or sleeping.

Manong Football Club was one of the most successful in the Island. It was a club that set the example of cutting across political differences to include members from different political backgrounds who played together and helped to further booster the unity that was experience among political prisoners in the Island.

The ongoing experiment with socialism on the Island is suspended in favour of a voracious attitude to winning. The Raiders demand respect almost immediately, their fans viewed as heretics by the elder statesmen of the community desperately concerned about the potentially fracturing effect of this rogue team of elitists. And then the impossible happens: in an insignificant knock-out match, the Raiders are controversially beaten by a team of self-confessed “old crocks”. A freaked goal was scored, the referee left the field in outrage, a desperate defense produced a 1-0 score line, and the Raiders were incensed. At once they threw themselves at the official channels, filing complaints, demanding official redress; but the MFA resists their charge. The result stands. It was an intolerable situation for Suze and his fellow Raiders, and at last they step outside the rules, so carefully laid down with so much negotiation, and stage a sit-in, hijacking the field and throwing the League into complete turmoil. It was an injury to all, and an injury that festers. Morale drops as the youthful, arrogant Raiders refused to back down. The community is in danger of fracturing. At last an elderly official took Suze aside, and helped him see past his pride and his outrage, to see the large effect of the stand-off. The Raiders relent, and backed down: soccer was saved, and with it, the emotional integrity of the community. Though scholars may argue that Robben Island sport was characterized by disunity and acts of resistance or war, I strongly uphold the fact that sport opened the eyes of political prisoners in Robben Island, brought them together and taught them life lessons that made them and the entire nation of South Africa what it is today.

That the Atlantic Raiders Affairs threatened the very existence of what the prisoners had worked hard to achieve is unquestionable but it was also an affair that forced Dikgang Moseneke to abandon his role as Chairman of the MFA to assume that of Appeals Tribunal prosecutor. This was a position that provided him with the foundation to his career as Deputy Chief Justice of the constitutional court of the nation of South Africa. To this day, it is asserted that Dikgang’s comrades take pleasure in reminding the Deputy Chief Justice of the Constitutional court of South Africa that the Atlantic Raiders presented him with his first opportunity to write a detailed legal brief. He put forward a strong case and ensured that the court focused on the specifics of what had happened, giving a close reading of the relevant provisions in the constitution of the MFA.384

The association was determined to involve as many of the political prisoners as possible, not just as players, but as linesmen, referees, club secretaries, and officials, first-aid units, coaches, trainers and grounds men. The association had as its official philosophy that soccer on Robben Island most especially was all-inclusive, offering sports, exercise, entertainment and some other kind of involvement and entertainment. This led to each club forming three teams.

With the right to play re-won, a committee of prisoners charged with organizing the teams and matches voted to unanimously change the name of the league from Matyeni to Makana Football Association. They had argued that the word matyeni (stone) reminded the players too much of the hard labour in the quarry. The committee chose something they thought combined the history of the Island with pride in their own heritage. Makana was the name of the Xhosa warrior-prophet who had been banished there by the British military in the 1819 for fighting against colonialist powers. He died the following year when the boat carrying him and thirty men attempting to escape the Island capsized. To the men on the Island, his inspiration was legend, his name fitting for their new soccer association. The MFA elected officials to begin the proper league matches and once again Dikgang Moseneke was chosen to head up the reform association and Indres Naidoo his right hand man. The constitution was redrafted with heated debate that involved members of the ANC and PAC but was finally unveiled in June 1969. Key in the constitution was that both the MFA and all players and officials should adhere to FIFA rules and standards. The constitution also made provision to include how complaints should be made. There were sections that also spelled out how players could be transferred from one club to another.

What I have always insisted to know is why political prisoners chose not just to do sport but to do organized sport especially soccer. They insisted to play soccer under strict FIFA rules and regulations in a place that was not regarded as part of this world; a place that was referred to as one of the worst hell hole on earth. One of the reasons advance for this decision was that the political prisoners believed that one day they will be leaders in their own country so they wanted to prepare themselves and as well to challenge themselves in leadership and organizational areas.

The political prisoners also speak of the unity sport brought which I will like to bring it under scrutiny more especially when reference is made to the Atlantic Raiders affair that almost
brought sporting activity to a halt. Does this affair not contradict the unity that is much spoken of within the sports fraternity on the Island?

Just as much as sports was looked upon by the political prisoners as a right that needed to be allowed on the Island, one could be tempted to say that it was used as a strategy to help boost the lives of political prisoners. One could also say that sports created a world of its own on the Island as the political prisoners had something that kept them exited and something that they always looked forward to as could be seen in their camping, training and strategies on how to handle opposing teams.

It can also be argued that sports opened up communication channels as political prisoners organized forums of discussion and also created a space where ideas could be shared. ‘Sport was very important to the men on the Island. It relieved the tension and anxiety about family, about home and about survival in prison itself’. 385

But apart from soccer there were also other sports that were played on Robben Island. Rugby, chess, table tennis, long tennis, athletics among others were all sports that formed part of the summer games that brought the political prisoners together. In my interview with Mr. Diba, he mentioned that in fact summer games became an important feature of life on the Island. What one should probably applaud is the precision with which the men in prison organized the event and the variety of activities that took place during these summer games.

Apparently, this had always been the intentions of the prisoners with time to introduce sports other than soccer in to the prison. According to archives, a group of prisoners interested in sports had written a draft constitution for something called the Robben Island Sports and Recreation Association with the philosophy to encourage the spirit of sportsmanship and cooperation among the prisoners on the Island across all manner of sporting activities. The draft constitution also stated the association’s intention to popularize sport by arranging matches and organizing talks and lectures, ensuring that every player in every sport would adhere to recognized standards as prescribed by international rules and to act as the pivot between all sporting bodies and the prison authorities. Soccer became successfully dominant and it remains one of the reasons why the other sporting activities took long to be established and

385 Tshwete cited in Schadeberg, *Voices from Robben Island*, p38
played on the Island was largely due to the successful introduction of soccer which took years to win the right to play and which had focused almost everyone’s energies on soccer alone.

With the Makana Football Association already established, hundreds of prisoners found themselves totally carried away by the day-to-day running of soccer and there was little time to think about setting up other sports. The unifying impact that soccer had on the men on the Island was undeniably massive and showed how much sport could mean.

Introducing rugby was not an idea that was to be taken lightly as many die hearted soccer players on the Island saw it as a complication to the already existing problems they face in running soccer to its full potentials. A letter from the Manong Football Club in February 1972 underlined the problem of setting up matches if rugby was to be allowed on the same pitch. They also pointed the challenges to be faced of re-lining the white line marking of the pitch if rugby was to be played first with the limited available. This once more almost gave a deadly blow to the men in prison as too many people started behaving badly both on the pitch and in meetings. They resorted to using words like “sellout”, which would have resulted to estrangement and ill feelings in within the prison community. The whole idea of sport as a strategy of maintaining group morale, boosting confidence, and facilitating unity and as an escape strategy to some who were experiencing depression as opposed to the division and disappointment that is being experience as a result of prison conditions was questioned by political prisoners.

Amidst all this internal squabble, one golden rule was however, never broken. The political prisoners at all times showed a unified, common face to the ‘enemy’. No matter how much they fought among themselves, internal disagreements were always put to side when it came to negotiating with the prison regime. This sense of solidarity and unity was never better exemplified on the Island than when the authorities threatened to withdrew recreation time because of what they claimed was the laziness of the prisoners.

The prisoners did not take the threat of withdrawing recreation time lightly. They unanimously decided to halt all sports activities on the Island and that was to be effective immediately. They unanimously agree a few weeks later through a joint committee made up of Steve Tshwete, Sedick Isaacs, Indres Naidoo, and other representatives to meet with the chief warder on duty to deliberate on the sport problem. The confidence in demanding to see
the Colonel by the prisoners was ‘construed as a threat and the commanding officer is not going to allow himself as commanding officer to be threatened’. In unity the denied the allegation and argued that it was a mere request to know the conditions under which recreation was allowed and whether it was fair to use withdrawal as a form of punishment. The men argued that such conditions were not conducive for organized sports. The confidence and unity in the action of the political prisoners of shutting down sport and not allowing it to be used against them, justify what sport meant to them and what sport did in building uniting the men under one voice against a common enemy.

On the prison ground level, tensions were mounting with each passing rugby game as rough play was reportedly sanctioned. The physical nature of the game often led to fights and bust-ups. Things did not rest off the pitch either as provocations and argument persisted.

The guards enjoyed watching the games that even Marcus Solomon became aware of two guards watching a free-flowing move that ended in a glorious try during a rugby match and applauded heartily. The guards started to see the men as skilful rugby players, not just terrorist and communists. They started coming to terms that political prisoners were human. Some the warders that love rugby started getting engaged with the game suggesting rugby tips the captains of the clubs and some went as far as offering their services as coaches. It was established that the inmates declined such offer by the guards politely. But again it goes further to justify just how much the prison staff were becoming involved in the sport. There were times when many of the warders had teams they supported openly during games and could be found appealing the decisions of the referees just as other spectators did on the Island. The dramatic incident that involved a guard, unhappy with the way his team was treated by the referee marched out on to the pitch with the intention to stop the match. The protest that lasted few seconds is a great testimony to the important of Robben Island rugby to not only the prisoners but also to the staff.386

The Olympic Games as earlier mention was probably one of the most exciting moments in the lives of political prisoners. Almost all of them participated in one sport or the other. The prisoners on the Island shared ideas that were championed by the then president of the International Olympic Committee Avery Brundage that sport could be a positive force in

building character, creating social change, and bringing people together in common cause. The organizers of the Robben Island Summer Games used the five-ring symbol used by the International Olympic Committee as a means of bringing together groups of men divided by bitter rivalries. With different games now running, within two years, the summer games have become the talk of the Robben Island community.

The prison community looked for different ways of creating a much more radiant vibe within their community. As much as they looked forward to its annual Olympics, they believe there was something missing to give their games the flare it deserves and that was prices. It has always been war to sport running in the Island and this time was no different. But this once again came through thanks to the negotiating efforts of Sedick. The authority did not allow trophies of any kind although sport had become a reality in the Island. The authorities never wanted the prisoners to have a permanent reminder of the sporting success. Even though conditions for the prisoners had improved on the Island, the men were there for a reason, to have their self esteem crushed and not raised. The organizing leaders decided to persuade for much more immediate interest to the athletes such as food, sweets, chocolates and biscuits that had become luxuries to the men on the Robben Island. In later years, teams that won the various leagues were given small trophies and certificates designed by the prisoners. The prison authorities would confiscate this immediately after the awards ceremony on the soccer field.

There was a deep sense of satisfaction and confident by the executives of the organizing sport committees that it had succeeded in its aim in organizing these games, to entertain our population and thereby take the prisoners’ minds away from the pain of imprisonment.

After the Soweto uprising, there was a new generation of prisoners into Robben Island prison. The young generation was not willing to listen to the older generation in prison. The youngsters defied orders, treated the guards with unrestrained contempt, and drew regular beatings for verbal abuse and arguing. The existing generation tried to convince them to find ways to make the best of their imprisonment and to use their time on the Island to strengthen themselves for the struggle, but the younger men became all the more suspicious of their motives and questioned their dedication to the struggle for freedom. The arrival of the Sowetan wave caused breakdown in social cohesion. At the beginning, the new prisoners

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387 Ibid,231
were scornful of two aspects of prison life which meant a great deal to the older men, the construction of the prison and the existence of organized sports. But as they began to play soccer on the pitch with the older men, a new mutual respect started to develop between them. The ability of the older players was surprisingly welcomed by the young prisoners who sat up and took more notice. Watching and seeing how they ran things on the Island made the youngster respected them the more. While on the other hand the older generation admired the talents of some gifted young players such as ‘Terror’ Lekota who began to see just how important soccer had been to the older generation recognizing that the game gave the men freedom in an unfree environment. Terror Lekota is better known today as the former South African Minister of Defence and former premier of the Free State province. He remarked that ‘without soccer, we would have been so depressed. It took your mind away’. A degree of social cohesion returned to the prison. This was evidently manifested in the unity of the prisoners during the period of renewed repression on Robben Island from the prison authorities.

Because of the larger crowds of prisoners, the commanding officer on Robben Island got worried and about future sports and thought it might be a source of conflict that would lead to disorder and decided to place limit on the number of men to be allowed out at a given time to play and as well restricted the number of spectators severely. The negotiating experience of the old men in prison came once more proved to the younger generation just how hard they had fought for the right to play sport and the new arrivals learned to respect their elders on the Island. One thing the elders did not ignore was the fact that they needed the younger men to take reins from Sedick Isaacs, Steve Tshwete, and others.

The new Soweto generation of political prisoners also took notice of the Robben Island Olympics conducted annually which also gave them particular pleasure. Mr. Diba in my interview also stressed the fact that the Olympic Games that were conducted had lasting memories as they really took the event to their hearts.

The early militant spirit of the new generation on Robben Island of non negotiation with the oppressor had been broken as they have embraced the wisdom of the old men in negotiating with the prison authorities. This was manifested in an urgent letter to the commanding officer.
from one of the new sport committee with an ‘urgent application for All-Sectional Summer Games’.

Though they longed for freedom, the political prisoners made a community on their own by learning to survive. They came from different backgrounds. They shared skills and unanimously pressed for organized sporting activities that not only help them cope with harsh prison conditions but also entertained their ‘imagined community’. An ‘imagined community’, according to Benedict, is a socially constructed community where members believe in belonging to a certain group of people (in his analysis of nation). They give themselves positions and a certain identity. Likewise, members in this community perceived themselves as a unified entity.389

During the student research seminar in December 2015, there were debates surrounding this topic. Professor Leslie Witz a prolific professor of the University of the Western Cape questioned the romantic endings of most writers on events and most especially sports on the Island and pointed that sport is another form of war. In this light sport can be seen as a country going to war with another country and group of people or individual going to war with another on the sporting ground as a show of prowess. This has thrown the doors wide open for researchers in the field and as well triggered my intellectual thinking and probing into the subject matter and which I would like to explore in the nearest future with the given opportunity. The different political parties on Robben Island had different political ideologies and strategies. Playing sport would have provided those with the opportunity to show case their supremacy. This was seen manifest when clubs were form based on political affiliation.

Also, Professor Leslie and many others present in the seminar were alarmed by the disunity that was witnessed as a result of the introduction of sports in the Island. They focused their attention on the formation of sports clubs based on political affiliation and forgot to acknowledge the fact that there were other clubs like Manong FC that recruited players based on their talent and ability and not base on their political affiliation and proofed to be the most successful club on the Island. In so doing the different political groups in prison quickly learns to put their differences aside to face a common enemy. At a time when it seemed like all hope was gone, as they ran out of ropes and began to drown, sports made its way and

became the lifeline that pull the men together and offered them renewed hope on what the future was to be. One would certainly be blind enough as to ignore the role of sport in bringing the men in prison together in fighting a common course.

**CONCLUSION**

At a time when despair and adversity threatened to overwhelm prisoners on Robben Island, sport became instrumental in forging good relationships between inmates. The prisoners produced a unique collection of records that covered the history of sport on Robben Island from 1966 to 1991 which one can easily access at the University of the Western Cape-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives.

Robben Island is normally associated with hardship, pain and suffering but these records show another side of prison life. One of the things that grabbed my attention and sparked my interest to actually undertake this journey into an in-depth study on how sport played a vital role in building the confidence and unity among political prisoners in Robben Island was my visit to the Robben Island Mayibuye archives located at the University of the Western Cape. I was overwhelmed with the way in which sports was organized. The meticulous handling of minutes, the constitution of the Makana Football Association and many more wet even further my appetite. They show a contrasting picture of vibrant sporting activities and a high level of social interaction between prisoners. If the prison authorities did not accord them the respect they deserve, the prisoners would at least respect each other and ensure that sporting passions did not overwhelm decent behaviour. Minutes and correspondence almost always referred to a community member as “Mr”.

For many political prisoners, sport provided a sense of normality, hope and strength which made their incarceration more endurable. These artefacts also bear witness to the unifying nature of sport and the high standards, principles and values which have come to be associated with political prisoners on Robben Island.

For a long time, Robben Island Museum has been criticised for solely putting more focusing on the political imprisonment narrative and more particularly on Nelson Mandela’s life.

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390 Buntman Fran, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid*, 67
Some scholars have dubbed this representation the ‘Mandelalisation’ of Robben Island in which the understanding of the Museum and the history and experience of political imprisonment and the liberation struggle in South Africa is understood in terms of the image of one man and icon, Mandela. Some institutions magnify Mandela and have used his name and image as a brand for political and economic gains or ‘commercialization’. This representation has silenced the memory and role many other figures, groups and activities like sport contributed to the history of the country.

Sports affected the lives of almost all political prisoners on the Island and as well help soften the hearts of the prison guards with regards to how they feel and thought of political prisoners. Robben Island museum therefore needs to do more in terms of deconstructing the Mandela myth and to strike a balance when educating the public on what figures, groups and activities particularly sports played in achieving our freedom. Yes, I agree with some scholars that there have been exhibitions on Robben Island sport in those days of the Caltex garage and different other exhibitions that have been done to this effect. That education need to be ongoing and could take other forms. I would recommend annual Robben Island events to be organized with different competitive sporting activities opened to public participation. Sport meant a lot to the men in prison without which we probably would not be talking of a free and democratic South Africa we are singing today. The collective unity that was much needed in prison only surfaced when the desire for organized sports by the men in prison intensified.

Despite coming from different political orientations, they rose up as a collective force to fight a common enemy through sport. I therefore urge the museum to consider the different suggestions and if possible think of ways that can help educate its public on the role of sports to the political prisoners and more especially in achieving the free and democratic South Africa of today. It should be noted that most of South Africa’s leaders today were very active in the organized sports that was carried out in Robben Island prison during their incarceration.

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SECRET COMMUNICATION DURING POLITICAL IMPRISONMENT ON ROBBEN ISLAND

BY

TARYN HANNAH MALAN

INTRODUCTION

Robben Island is a World heritage site and it has an extremely long history. Over this period Robben Island was used for various purposes. However, this essay focuses on the period from the 1960s onwards, when Robben Island became a political prison during the apartheid years, for many who were part of the anti-apartheid struggle.

Research Aim

Robben Island was clearly a place of torment for prisoners. In no way does the aim of this research disagree with it, but it aims to look at the Island between the 1960s and 1980s in terms of how political prisoners found ways to survive and constitute themselves as a community. This essay focuses specifically on communication and how prisoners communicated with one another as well as with the outside world, despite being restricted and incarnated. Therefore, I have focused on different forms of communication, such as those between warders and prisoners and how prisoners communicated generally and secretly to one another. This research, aims to contribute to the understanding of communication on Robben Island during the time of political imprisonment and this would then further add to our understanding of Robben Island as a world heritage site.

Research Question

There were many restrictions that political prisoners had to face on Robben Island. They were isolated and continuously guarded. They were abused, humiliated and their freedom was taken away from them. Warders tried to break down their spirits and morale and tried to take away their humanity. How did prisoners then survive it all? Could it be argued that communication helped them survive? But even their freedom to communicate was stripped away from them. How did these prisoners then develop a sense of ‘secret communication’ and a community, despite the restrictions placed on them by the authorities?
Background/Rationale of the study

Robben Island is currently a World Heritage site. Robben Island is well known to be a place of suffering, where there is a three layered history. Robben Island was always used as a place of banishment, ‘punishment’ and torture.\(^{392}\) One of the well known histories of Robben Island is the imprisonment of political prisoners. We do know how badly these political prisoners were treated and how they suffered greatly on the Island for the freedom of South Africa. Their struggle has not gone down in vain. Yet there is another way of looking at the history of Robben Island, one can focus on how it became a place of community and survival. Prisoners did not allow their conditions and suffering to prevent them from fighting against the apartheid regime and to seek survival strategies. They created a place of community, unity and survival through means of communication.

Literature Review

I have looked at general histories of Robben Island, biographies and autobiographies of political prisoners who were imprisoned on Robben Island. The focus of this literature review is to understand the main factors or aspects that the number of authors have dealt with in their books, articles or chapters.

Fran Buntman’s book is the one of the major books that focuses on political prisoners on Robben Island. Her main argument is how political prisoners used resistance during imprisonment for their survival and importantly to continue the anti-apartheid struggle by means of continuing political organisation which was banned in South Africa; their aim was to keep it alive. Therefore, they needed to work out strategic plans of resistance. Buntman also shows that many of the political prisoner’s debates, conversations or discussion and values played a major role in the constitution of the ‘new’ South Africa.\(^{393}\)

Charlene Smith, focuses on a broader history of Robben Island in her book. She does not just focus on the history of Robben Island as a political prison but its long history during which it was used for many purposes by many governments. She shows Robben Island was always used as a place of banishment and punishment. Robben Island was also taken over or ‘colonised’ by the Dutch and British. Robben Island was also used as a place where people

\(^{392}\)Charlene Smith, *Robben Island. Mayibuye History and Literature No. 7* (Cape Town: Struik publishers, 1997).

unwanted in society such as lepers were banished to. Xhosa chiefs were sent to Robben Island for disobeying or standing up against the colony. In about the 1940s Robben Island was also used as a defence and training base during World War II. Lastly she speaks about the well-known history of Robben Island which was used as a place to imprison anti-apartheid activists. She elaborates on the scars of the four centuries Robben Island carries of human suffering of human suffering.\textsuperscript{394}

There are other works such as Crawford and Dyer, which focus on the natural history of Robben Island. Their focus is on the Island’s environment, and how conservers have to manage and conserve it. They argue that the cultural heritage of Robben Island is intertwined with its natural heritage. They focus on its topography and the indigenous vegetation and the different species of animals on the Island.\textsuperscript{395}

There are many memoirs and autobiographies by political prisoners. Eddie Daniels and Ahmed Kathrada’s books begin with their childhood. They then explain their journey into politics. Daniels was part of the Liberal Party of South Africa, whereas Kathrada was part of the ANC. Both provide a full history of their life showing how they ended up being imprisoned on Robben Island and Kathrada’s book also focuses on the democratic transition.\textsuperscript{396} Kathrada was the leader of the communication committee on the Island and found strategies how to get information, such as smuggling newspapers.\textsuperscript{397}

Indres Naidoo’s autobiography, one of the earliest of the prisoner accounts to be published has three parts. He does not give a history from his childhood but starts his book by going straight into his political activities against apartheid government and the incidents that got him caught by the apartheid police where he was sent to trial. Naidoo’s writing points to the harsh treatment by the warders and how the warders dehumanised them. His book makes a major contribution towards understanding the harshness of life on Robben Island.\textsuperscript{398}

Raymond Mhlaba’s ‘Personal Memoirs’ are quite broad starting from his childhood, like many autobiographies. He gives reference to the political organizations which they formed in prison. The way in which he explains the political organisations shows they were well-

\textsuperscript{394}Smith, Robben Island.
\textsuperscript{395}Robert Crawford & Bruce Dyer, Wildlife of Robben Island, (Cape Town: Avian Demography Unit, 2000).
\textsuperscript{397}Daniels, There and Back, 94-95.
\textsuperscript{398}Indres Naidoo, Island in Chains: ten years on Robben Island (Harmondsworth, 1982).
structured and had much order. There were various committees such a communication committee which would help find ways to communicate outside world. This was all organised in secret without making it known to warders. He shows the unity that was formed and how important visits and letters were.⁴⁹⁹

According to Jama Matakata it was of importance to build relationships with warders, which could be your breakthrough as a prisoner. He emphasises greatly on the importance of community and unity which was created on the Island by the political prisoners, and the importance of communicating and letters which they received and how all this contributed to their survival. He was a young prisoner and arrived when conditions were a bit better. Importantly he shows how they developed good relationships despite the diversity in terms of politics.⁴⁰⁰

Jan Coetzee wrote an interesting biography, where he collected six stories of six ‘ordinary’ political prisoners who were imprisoned on Robben Island. They each give their own personal experience of Robben Island; some of them give a brief history of their lives before their imprisonment. They all show how the prisoners managed to deal with long periods of incarceration and how they managed to turn harsh punishment of prison into an opportunity of personal growth and the attainment of collective political ideals.⁴⁰¹

Mac Maharaja’s biography focuses on various well known ex-political prisoners who were imprisoned on Robben Island. The book consists of essays written by Mandela, Sisulu, Kathrada, Mbeki, Nair, Pokela, Daniels and Toivo. What is important about these essays is that they were written secretively while they were imprisoned on the Island, which was smuggled out of prison. These essays show that even though they were imprisoned physically, their thoughts were never imprisoned. These essays show the importance of memory, history for the individuals and ‘community’.⁴⁰²

Finally, Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, is a personal encounter of his childhood, his political activities, and his imprisonment on Robben Island. This autobiography is a huge contribution to understanding the struggle of apartheid, what prisoners were faced with at Robben Island, how the survived and how conditions were

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changed due to their unity and resistance. Many chapters of Mandela’s book were written on the Island in secrecy.\textsuperscript{403}

There are many more books, bibliographies and memoirs that are available, but for my literature review I have made use of a selective collection that has been used above.

**Methodology**

This research focuses on communication drawn from the selective collection of autobiographies and biographies to specifically highlight discussions about communication and how it contributed to the building of a community on Robben Island.

I also made use of research interviews. I conducted interviews with two ex-political prisoners and have heard what they had to say about communication in general on the Island and secret communication methods that were used. In conducted two interviews from Vincent Diba and G.S. Vincent Diba was born on the 15 September 1959 and was imprisoned on Robben Island 1983-1991, he works at Jetty One Exhibition Museum in Waterfront. G.S was born on the 28 July 1956 and was imprisoned on the Island 1980-1990, he works on the Island, but is not a tour guide.

According to the ACTAG report, oral history forms part of living tradition heritage and is of vital importance to keep memories and stories of African people alive which were previously suppressed.\textsuperscript{404} Furthermore, Hofmeyr argues that there is something greater than just whether or not oral histories are authentic or not. It is about understanding what happened during the interval between the events and telling the story of the event. It is about how the story is narrated and why it takes that form. She is saying that memory happens in a certain way and it should not be judged for inaccuracy, because history is not just about facts and dates, but how the narratives are formed.\textsuperscript{405}

Therefore, I have used this approach that Hofmeyr has put forth when taking the interviews into account, I have looked at what the narrator says, the meanings of it, rather than just focusing on whether its authentic or not. My aim has been to understand what the narrator remembers in the sense of what is important to him.


\textsuperscript{404} Report of the Arts and Culture Task Group, presented to the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (Pretoria, 1995).

CHAPTER ONE: ISOLATION

Secret communication is one of the creative aspects which were initiated by former political prisoners on Robben Island during imprisonment, as well as other prisons. However, in this research paper Robben Island as a political prison is the prime focus. Former political prisoners on Robben Island underwent unexplainable torture, suffering and hardship which will be part of their memories forever. Yet through all the suffering and torment, they continued to fight within the prison by means of finding survival strategies and resistance methods one of which is secret communication. The way in which many former political prisoners went about seeking and creating secret communication is intriguing, creative and out of the box. I would like to argue that secret communication has both positive and negative factors. Negative because secret communication has led to miscommunication and non-communication dangers many times. This will be discussed in more detail below, but the essence of this argument is that there was a flaw or negative factor that was linked to secret communication is that many times messages never went out, the information they gained or received were rumours or supported by just what they heard, which led to a since of miscommunication by interpreting things in an incorrect manner, for an example.

They could have given up, they could have felt sorry for themselves, and they could have given in to the psychological torment they suffered. However, they fought to resist the warders’ methods to destroy them, physically and psychologically. It is as if every time the apartheid government and warders thought they got the political prisoners where they wanted and defeated them, they stood up stronger. What I find amazing is that they were isolated on Robben Island, but they still found way to communicate with one another, get information from the outside world, and educate each other with what is happening outside prison etc. News was important to them. It was their means of survival and hope.

Fran Buntman’s argument in her book, Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid is in relation to my aim in this research paper and my research question. She focused on Robben Island during political imprisonment as a place of resistance, rather than just torment, suffering. She argued that many resistance and survival strategies was created by political prisoners and that they continue the anti-apartheid struggle by means of continuing political organisations which were banned in South Africa; their aim was to keep it alive. Therefore, they needed to work out strategic plans of resistance. Buntman also shows that many of the
political prisoners’ debates, conversations or discussion and values played a major role in the constitution of the ‘new’ South Africa.  

Buntman focuses on many forms of resistance and survival strategies, whereas my main focus is on secret communication being a form of resistance and survival strategy. It was a form of resistance, because communication was not allowed on the Island, the political prisoners were always watched, ‘controlled’ and searched. Therefore, it was not easy and they had to seek out strategic methods to get messages across to one another or to find out any news from the outside world and even get messages from and to the outside world. Indres Naidoo expresses in his autobiography the terrible conditions in which they were faced with on the Island. For instance the beatings, it was so bad that the warders declared that on the Island the political prisoner will die.  

Naidoo shows how restricted the Island was when it came to communication, or anything as a matter of fact. In his autobiography he explains his arrival to the Island and gives a description that shows you how isolated the Island was. As he says “…no other human beings around; just prison personnel, keeping us under close guard as we clambered ashore in our chains, lurching and pulling against our partners”. This shows how he saw the Island as an isolated place when he first arrived, a place which had many restrictions and faced with guards who were forever watching them. They were in chains, brought into prison like animals. Furthermore, Naidoo explains that they were constantly monitored even when eating their porridge which was ice-cold, and that even when they turned their heads even a fraction they got a crack with a fist or a baton. They were not allowed to talk at all. This shows how communication was restricted from the political prisoners in a brief manner, because there suffering is so much greater than words or writing could explain. The above description that Naidoo gives in the same time where he sees hundreds of other prisoners for the first time, who were mostly political prisoners and some common law, but imagine that feeling of feeling isolated before and now you see many other comrades whom you want to speak to, but cannot.

In addition, Naidoo explains their work conditions at the stone quarry as being horrible, what stood out for me, was that they had to work in silence. He says that they marched in four

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408 Ibid, 51.
409 Ibid, 55.
silent columns across the Island to the old quarry. They had to be silent when marching to their ‘work station’. He says that “[n]o one sang. No one whistled. No one spoke. Four long columns, moving without a sound”. Even when working, enduring in hard labour there had to be silence. It is clear that Naidoo emphasis on the fact that they had to be silent, everything was taken from them even the freedom of communicating freely.

Another form of silence and restriction when it came to communication on the Island is related to Robert Sobukwe, who lived like a civilian on the Island meaning he had his own house, and could wear civilian clothing. However, he was isolated on the Island. He was not a prisoner yet; he did not have his freedom. He could not engage with the other political prisoners. He was filled with isolation and silence. He had no-one to communicate with when he felt lonely in his house. Naidoo explains that Robert Sobukwe was the leader of the PAC, and when the PAC would walk pass him or be near to him, they would be filled with excitement. He says that it was obvious that he was in no position to greet them in any way, and neither were they as political prisoners. However, Robert Sobukwe still managed now and then to move his head in such a way which would indicate that he recognised them as political prisoners. Even though the warders shouted at them to look straight ahead and not at Robert Sobukwe, as it was forbidden, they still managed to get sidelong glances. I would argue that this is a form of non-verbal communication, they were not allowed to great each other, yet Robert Sobukwe knew it was forbidden and so did the political prisoners yet they showed each other recognition. They knew what this recognition meant inside their hearts.

Eddie Daniels also talks about the restrictions in terms of communication on Robben Island during political imprisonment. As he expresses that in the 1970s the authorities started to increase their pressure on them. They pushed them hard and instructed them to maintain strict silence at work. This meant that they were expected to be silent for 24-hours, due to the fact that were also not allowed to communicate or make a noise in their cells as well. Once again we get the experience from another former political prisoner who shows us how communication was restricted and that they were expected to be silent, to not talk with one another. Communication was something that was forbidden. An example in which Daniels gives is of one prisoner named Johannes Dangala, he sang quietly to himself at work, and the

410 Ibid, 58.
411 Ibid, 58.
413 Eddie Daniels, There and Back: Robben Island 1964-979 (Cape Town: Mayibuye books, 1998), 151.
warder shouted at him, “Silence, you must not talk”. According to Daniels the security on the Island was extremely tight. They were not allowed any permission or opportunity to be in contact with the outsiders or even prisoners in other sections. Therefore everything they did was done in secret, as Vincent Diba told me in my interview with him. Meaning that many things were not allowed on the Island such as communication, they therefore needed to find ways to make this work, to resist these ‘laws’ or restrictions by having strategic plans and ways of doing things, such as secret communication.

Moreover, Buntman gives a report from Kwedi Mkaliipi who has said that in the general cells the treatment was worse than in the single cells and that being in your own cell had its advantages such as the ability to study in privacy. However, he also notes that there were disadvantages of being in your own cell in which was the feeling of loneliness. Mkaliipi continues to point out that the men in single cells were locked in their cell for longer hours and they had far less (legal) contact with their fellow prisoners compared to those in general cells. Furthermore, Buntman says that different cell sections were designed in order to separate prisoners and prevent their communication. In other words the prison warders did everything to maintain the restriction and prevention of communication. However not even these restrictions could stop political prisoners from finding ways to communicate with one another, gain knowledge from outside world etc. as will be discussed in more detail below.

Additionally, in Jama Matakata’s autobiography, Hills of Hope, he shows us how tormenting the experience of being isolated, alone and in silence it can be to a political prisoner. Before going over to Robben Island, political prisoners were usually kept in the holding cell at Jetty 1, which was the gateway to get the boat to go over to the Island. Before even being isolated on the Island, Matakata felt the isolation, silence and restriction of communication at Jetty No. 1. He says that “the holding cell was positioned in such a way that it was impossible to see or communicate with anyone on the outside”.

Matakata arrived to the Island in 1989, where the conditions on the Island had improved to a certain extent. However, conditions were still terrible, they were still treated badly. As Makata expresses how lonely he was when he was placed into C section when he arrived to

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414Ibid, 151.
415Ibid, 156.
416Interview with Vincent Diba, 2 October 2015.
417Fran Lisa Buntman, Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid, 40.
418Ibid, 40.
the Island. He says that he was alone until Zamile Mazantsana, Sfiso Buthelezi, Bushy Maape as well as others were brought to C section later on. He says that he was relieved not to be alone anymore, as before he has had no one to speak to, besides Magxwalisa, the Mk prisoner who brought his meals. This shows how alone political prisoners felt most of the time, especially as seen above when restrictions in terms of communicating were heightened. They were so afraid of the influence they would have on each other when communicating. Therefore, I would argue it was highly restricted. However, as it will be continuously argued throughout this paper that political prisoners were not stagnated by these restrictions.

Another way in which the prison authorities of Robben Island restricted their communication was by means of censoring letters in which received from loved ones, as well as those which they have sent to their loved ones. The authorities knew how much the political prisoners valued written correspondence, but they continued censoring their letters. This meant that many important messages were left out, leaving one unable to understand and even misinterpret the letters which caused irreplaceable breakdowns in families and marriage. Disputes arose and it psychologically destroyed prisoners and relationships. Despite all of this Matakata still says that “it was better to get an over-censored letter, than none at all”.

The above form of communication restriction with the prisoners and loved ones shows the power in which the authorities had. In my interview with Vincent Diba, he speaks about a similar incident as the above how letters were censored, leaving one confused and how warders deliberately caused trouble by replacing the names of letters and even not sending letters to loved ones. In this he shows the power relations in communication and how they tried to psychologically destroy them in terms of communication by the censoring of letters, causing emotional trauma trouble. They would do and use anything in which they thought would destroy the former political prisoners. Furthermore, Matakata explains how they as political prisoners craved communication. They were faced with restrictions when it came to visiting hours and the amount of visitors one could receive.

Matakata emphasizes the importance of ‘regular’ communication by saying that friends did everything to encourage people on the outside to write to the men who did not receive any

420Ibid, 72.
421Ibid, 76.
422Interview with Vincent Diba on 2 October 2015.
423Ibid, 77.
letters from and they would ask people to come and visit lonely prisoners. This shows that Robben Island was a very lonely place and the one that kept prisoners going was letters in which they received from their loved ones. Therefore, they could only imagine how it must have felt when their fellow comrades never received any letters or visitors. As mentioned above, Matakata makes it clear that even though letters were heavily censored, it was still better to receive such a letter than none at all. This does not only show how important communication in general was to political prisoners, but also gives a sense of community which was formed on the Island between the prisoners.

He also emphasizes on the importance of receiving visitors, this would make a big difference in the prisoner’s lives. They would at times receive good or bad news and it would hurt them tremendously, because there was nothing they could do about the situation, whether it was family issues or politics. However, they learnt how to accept it and deal with these restrictions. This is what stands out for me about these former political prisoners despite their circumstances, restrictions and struggle they continued to find ways to deal with it and continue to be strong. I am not saying that they never felt defeated or like giving up. Even Nelson Mandela in Long walk to Freedom has written that when he was in isolation he questioned his purpose and whether the struggle and sacrifice was worth it. The important thing is that the continued fighting, resisting and being strong, as Nelson Mandela says that some are weaker than others, therefore the stronger ones strives to help the weaker ones and both would become stronger in the process.

One of the many restrictions Kathrada mentions in his Memoirs are in relation to the fact that his correspondence had been withheld by the authorities. He has gained access to his confiscated mail when he was released and he was concerned with the reasons why they withheld certain letters. In relation in my interview with Diba he has spoken about something similar to this. Diba explained that many times one would send a letter to one’s loved one and after many years when one were released one would receive that same letter and one would realise that they withheld one’s letter and that they never sent it to one’s loved one. He also says that when one’s loved one visited and one would ask if they have

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424Ibid, 77.
425Ibid.
426Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom, 463-464
428Interview with Vincent Diba on 2 October 2015
received one’s letter, but they would respond by saying no they have not.429 This shows that many times prisoners thought that their letters has been sent out, and were maybe expecting a response, but this did not occur because the authorities would withhold certain letters.

On Robben Island during political imprisonment there was a separation between prisoners, one being the single cells and then the communal cells or general prison section. This meant that those political prisoners who were in the single cells were separated or isolated from them in the general cells. Nelson Mandela notes in his Long Walk to Freedom that there are two reasons why they were isolated from the general prisoners, as he was also one of the prisoners who was placed in the single cell section. He says that there were two reasons: they were considered riskier from a security perspective but even more dangerous from a political standpoint. He says that the authorities were concerned that they might ‘infect’ or in other words influence the other prisoners with their political views.430

Nelson Mandela explains that normally in prison the few happy or celebratory times was seeing old friends and new faces. However, during the first few years of Robben Island as a political imprisonment during the 1960s, Mandela says that the atmosphere was extremely oppressive and they were not even able to greet each other. Restrictions were extreme as there were as many guards as prisoners in which they enforced every regulation with threats and intimidation.431

Mandela says that one of the most inhuman restrictions was under the category system which was given to the political prisoners on Robben Island; your category determined the benefits you would receive. Nelson Mandela was placed as a ‘D’ group prisoner. Therefore, he was only allowed one visitor, and could write and receive one letter every six months. He felt this was inhuman because communication with one’s family should be a right; however, this right was taken away from prisoners like many of their other rights. Furthermore, he says that as a political prisoner one’s visits and letters were restricted to ‘first degree relatives’ only. They felt that this restriction was extremely racist because the African sense of family is different in comparison to the European or the Westerner. Africans families are larger and more

429Ibid.
inclusive, meaning that anyone who says they are a descent from a common ancestor is seen as part of the same family.\textsuperscript{432}

Silence became a big factor in which many political prisoners were faced with, as mentioned above, especially in the earlier years when Robben Island was used for the political prisoners during the 1960s and 1970s. For an example, Eddie Daniels expressed how horrible it was to be faced with silence, as he says that on his way to the Island he was alone in the dirty hold of a prison boat, in which he had no one to share his fears with. Even when he first arrived to the Island he felt this silence and loneliness, he was placed in a section which he explains as being “cold, bleak and grim and deathly silent”.\textsuperscript{433} Furthermore, he says that when he was placed in the cell he could hear the warder’s footsteps fading away and he was all alone with his thoughts and fears.\textsuperscript{434}

The above shows how silence was one of the many challenges or circumstances in which former political prisoners were faced with, and as if the restrictions in terms of communication were not bad enough they were still placed in isolation when they went against the authority, where they truly experience silence of its highest. Therefore, when political prisoners spoke to another, gave gestures, advice and support it formed a community on Robben Island. They knew the restrictions they were faced with, the harsh conditions and suffering, therefore they needed one another; they needed to communicate in order to form a support group in order to prevent one from giving up and going down psychologically.

\textsuperscript{432} Ibid, 474.
\textsuperscript{433} Eddie Daniels, \textit{There and Back}, 145-146.
\textsuperscript{434} Ibid, 146.
CHAPTER TWO: SECRET COMMUNICATION

The significance of secret communication in a form of resistant strategies used by former political prisoners was that they were faced by many restrictions as discussed above. It was not something easy, the significance of it is that they never gave up, never allowed the circumstances and the restrictions in which they were faced with in terms of communication they still found strategies to resist such restrictions by strategizing ways to communicate to one another, the outside world and to obtain and receive news. In relation Coetze explains that the purpose of his biography in which consists of six stories of six former political prisoners who aims to tell their stories by showing that through all the restrictions, punishments and laws which were against them and meant to control their lives, they still had forms of resistance. Many were arrested due to their resistance and they continued keeping their resistance alive on Robben Island.435

Coetze says that their forms of resistance strategies could not have been possible without unity and support. Coetze explains that the six combination of memoirs of ordinary former political prisoners shows that political prisoners took a stand against harsh treatments on the Island.436 In my understanding and importantly in relation to my argument or aim of my research paper is that Coetze aims to show that importance or significance of Robben Island is not just that our former political prisoners struggled and suffered for us, but that they overcame, they resisted and continued fighting, as he says “[e]ven less is known about how they managed to turn the harsh punishment of prison life into an opportunity for personal growth and the attainment of collective political ideals”.437 In other words they found opportunities in anything they were faced in prison life.

Indres Naidoo explains how on his arrival he met many comrades whom he had never seen for long periods before, as well as others whom he had never met at all coming from other parts of the country. The important part of this moment or experience was that these comrades were very helpful to them, they gave them courage and confidence in the struggle. They warned them that work on the Island was extremely hard and that they would suffer badly and that one might even feel like killing oneself, but they encouraged them that they will get through it and must have strength.438 This shows a support group, a community that

436 Ibid, 6-11.
437 Ibid, 1.
438 Indres Naidoo, Island in Chains, 57.
is formed by communicating as those who were imprisoned on the Island knew how it could weaken you psychologically and physically, therefore they needed to be there for one another.

Similarly, Joseph Faniso Mati a former political prisoner of Robben Island says that when he arrived on the Island in 1964 it was a privilege to encounter that the ANC on Robben Island was already organised. This meant that there were group leaders and a structure. These people who were in charge (former political prisoners who were on the ANC committee on Robben Island), would call in the new-comers and communicate with them, by briefing them about how things were tough on the Island, they would tell them what they must and must not do, they would tell them that the struggle continues and that in prison the conditions were bad. The importance of this, in relation to the above example is that it shows community and support. Former political prisoners cared for one another, they felt a need to prepare the new comers, because they knew how tough it was and that one can easily feel like giving up. It was important for them to know that they were not alone, but as comrades they would stand together. Also, the fact that they communicated like this and that political organizations were formed shows somewhat of a secret and resistant strategy which was formed.

According to Nelson Mandela, their survival in prison depended on their understanding about what the authorities were attempting to do with them and to share that understanding with each other. Mandela says that the greatest mistake of the authorities was to keep them together. As Kathrada also uses a quote in his memoir that says “[a]ll dictators know it is safer to kill political opponents than to imprison them”, together they found strength in one another. Mandela says that together their determination was reinforced. They supported one another and gained strength from one another. Whatever they knew and learned they would share it with each other. It was by sharing that they multiplied they courage which they had individually.

One of the ways they were mistreated and dehumanised was the way in which the warders spoke to them. Their communication, their language towards the former political prisoners was always defiling, degrading and as if they were not speaking to human beings, but animals. According to Naidoo, warders spoke to former political prisoners in the most dehumanising way possible. This was exposed on political mainly in the earlier years of

439 Coetzee, Plain Tales from Robben Island, 17.
440 Ahmed Kathrada, Memoirs, 224.
441 Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom, 463.
political imprisonment. Nevertheless, warders would swear at them, call them ‘pigs’ and would declare that on the Island they would die. They would search the political prisoner’s bodies in the most humiliating ways. The warders would proclaim that the ‘white’ man was the boss and projected as many insults to them which they continuously repeated. They projected their power onto the former political prisoners by the way in which they spoke to them, which was done in a manner to belittle them and they way they touched their bodies showed that they could do with them whatever they wanted to.

As mentioned above, when Naidoo arrived on the Island the warders spoke to them in inhumane ways. They would ensure them that on ‘this’ Island they were going to die. Naidoo says that words like “‘Kaffir’, ‘Koelie’ and ‘Boesman’ went flying left, right and centre”. This is the manner in which they were spoken to and how they were thought of, in racist and degrading terms. Former political prisoners were also expected to speak to warders in Afrikaans, because that was the language of the warders. Indres says that during his arrival he responded to a warder in English and the warder said “God water taal praat jy jong”- God what language are you using, man”. They would continue by saying “…in die plek praat ons Afrikaans nie daardie kaffir boetie taal nie”- here we don’t use that kaffir-lovers language”. They would say that here on the Island they are the Baas (the boss) and that they prisoners must address them as Baas. When Naidoo continued to respond back to the warder in English and explained that he does not understand Afrikaans, the warder said that “if you know what is … good for you, you will learn to Afrikaans bloody fast”.

In relation to secret communication during political imprisonment on Robben Island, many autobiographies which I have focused on make reference to how the common law prisoner helped them with a great deal in gaining information from the outside world. Ahmed Kathrada says in his Memoirs that common-law prisoners were their main source of news. The reason Kathrada says that they were the main source of news is because they could get newspapers and even were able to lay their hands on radios. The common law prisoners made it possible for a radio to be smuggled into the prison at one point, and Kathrada

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442 Indres Naidoo, Island in Chains, 54-55.
443 Ibid.
444 Ibid, 51.
445 Ibid, 52.
446 Ibid, 52.
447 Ibid, 52.
448 Ahmed Kathrada, Memoirs, 246.
449 Ibid.
explains this as being wonderful to have, but when they batteries died, there was no way of replacing them and they had to dismantle the radio as they had no safe place to hide it.\textsuperscript{450} Political prisoners use trade exchange items like soap, toothpaste and cigarettes in exchange for newspapers with common law prisoners. The common law prisoner got clever and realised how much the news meant to the former political prisoner and that they were desperate for it. They then decided to provide single pages rather entire publications at a time. In other words, they took the political prisoners desperation to their advantage.\textsuperscript{451}

Interestingly according to Kathrada an astute warder pointed out the difference between a political prisoner and a common-law prisoner. He said that the difference is that if he should leave food, money and a newspaper on his desk, the common-law prisoner would steal the food and money whereas the political prisoner would only steal the newspaper.\textsuperscript{452} This shows how much the news meant to them, it was more precious than food and money. In relation, Buntman also notes that a former political prisoner Neville Alexander said that there were non-political prisoners helped the political prisoners to obtain contraband newspapers and news, as newspapers and radios were prohibited for the political prisoners.\textsuperscript{453} Indres Naidoo explains that wherever they moved they found themselves mixed in with the common-law prisoners. Naidoo described many of them looking evil with scarred and battered faces whose bodies were muscular and physically tense. He says that many of them threatened the political prisoners by saying, “Watch out. We’ll get you”.\textsuperscript{454} However, not all of them were evil, he shows us that there were common law prisoners who helped them and they would say “Don’t worry. We’ll look after you”.\textsuperscript{455}

Naidoo provides an illustration of how common-law prisoners helped them. A prisoner came up to them quietly, as if he was on his way somewhere, but instead he told them that he had something for them and they saw he had a newspaper in his hand. They were shocked that they could not believe what they were seeing, Naidoo says, because they have not seen a newspaper in six months, since being imprisoned. The prisoner, who gave them the newspaper, told them to be careful, for if they were caught they would be heavily punished and he vanished. Naidoo says that they were eager to consume every word in the

\textsuperscript{450}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{451}Kathrada, \textit{Memoirs}, 246.
\textsuperscript{452}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{453}Fran Buntman, \textit{Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid}, 42.
\textsuperscript{454}Indres Naidoo, \textit{Island in Chains}, 56.
\textsuperscript{455}Ibid.
newspaper. This not only shows the major instrument in which some common-law prisoners played in helping or making it possible for former political prisoners to obtain news or information, but their eagerness and the joy they received when they obtained a newspaper and how hungry they were for news and communication.

There are so many more unique and creative strategic methods which were implemented by former political prisoners, but I will only discuss only a few of these strategies and also discuss how secret communication led to miscommunication. The collecting, stealing and smuggling in of newspaper has become a prime mission or strategy of former political prisoners' lives. Nelson Mandela explains that newspaper was more precious than diamonds and gold. They craved news from the outside world, and newspapers informed them what was happening outside. They have and would have risked their lives just to obtain a newspaper. They even had strategic methods to read the newspapers without getting caught by the warders.

One of the instances which indicate how important it was for former political prisoners to obtain newspapers can be read in Eddie Daniels 'There and Back' and is also made reference in Kathrada’s Memoirs. Daniels explains this incident which involved Daniels himself and Hennie Ferris. He says that when they would have to walk to the camp to chop wood they would have walk pass the rubbish dump. One day when they walked pass this rubbish dump on the Island an intact newspaper caught their eye. They then discussed how they had to handle this situation and get hold of this newspaper which they saw. Daniels says that Hennie was the one whom volunteered to go and fetch the newspaper while Daniels had to keep a watch. The collection of the newspaper was a big risk that Eddie and Hennie took because if they were caught they would have been shot because it would have looked as if they were trying to escape, due to where the dump was situated and all they had to do to get there.

Another example which shows how desperate they were for news is on Sunday’s the prisoners had an opportunity were a priest would come to the Island to keep a service, as Kathrada and other former political prisoners such as Mandela and Daniels explains that one Sunday Hennie Ferris asked Brother September who kept the sermon, if he could lead the congregation in prayer. Hennie took his time in his prayer and insisted that everyone should

456 Ibid.
457 Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom, 492.
459 Eddie Daniels, There and Back, 163-164.
close their eyes. Meanwhile Eddie Daniels tiptoed to the briefcase of the pastor and removed the copy of the *Sunday Times*. The above example shows how important news was for them. The prayer that Hennie led was a strategic plan between Hennie and Eddie in which was created and decided upon at that given moment when they noticed the newspaper.

The common-law prisoners were not the only means of obtaining information. Political prisoners themselves developed and organised strategic methods to obtain information, to communicate with one another and the outside world. Buntman focuses mainly on the resistance of the former political prisoners, in which shows how they developed strategic methods to resist and overcome the restraints of imprisonment. I would argue that Buntman’s main argument is that even though the former political prisoners on Robben Island suffered badly, their resistance was what benefitted and transformed the South African politics.

Political groups maintained forms of the underground in prison, because they had to continue with the struggle inside prison and they had to resist all the forms of restraints or restrictions that were imposed on them as political prisoners. The forms of underground in prison was the smuggling of news and messages, organisation of political meetings, the usage of study material in order to write political communication, allowing those who did not study to read the books that were sent to actual students, they read or transcribed books that were banned by the authorities, either in prison or in South Africa as a whole. All of these forms of underground mentioned above were an act that violated the prison rules and therefore it had to remain a secret. In relation, underground in prison is linked to secret communication. Leaders aimed to provide information that was unavailable or illegal to get. Buntman says that Sisulu provided “a walking history of the organization”. My understanding of ‘a walking history of the organization’ is that history lessons on organization had to be done in such a way that the authorities do not realise or know what they are talking about, yet it was essential for them to give a history of the organisation so that the member can understand the meaning and the purpose of the organisation, yet it was illegal to form and speak about political organizations inside and outside of imprisonment. However, the political prisoners still made it possible by means of strategic methods. Furthermore, it is noted by Buntman, that the fundamental aspect, in other words the most important aspect of the political prisoner’s resistance was the struggle to obtain news. She explains that the political prisoners

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461 Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance*.
462 Ibid, 86.
463 Ibid, 94.
were faced with the struggle on a daily basis to obtain news by a collection of illegal means. 464

Various committees were formed in prison and one of these was the communication committee which was led by Ahmed Kathrada. 465 Although Kathrada led the communication committee this was done with the help of various other ANC prisoners at different point in time depending on who was imprisoned. 466 In relation to the communication committee, it was organised in such a way that everything was done in order to be secretive and to protect the committee and it’s strategies from being discovered by the prison authorities.

In relation, in my interview with G.S, he said that he was not involved in secret communication, because you had to be selected to be part of the communication system or team. 467 This is supported in the memoirs of many former political prisoners who were on the Island. Communication systems were formed to find indigenous and creative way to secretly communicate and smuggle information inside of the prison and outside. There was a leader of the communication system, and a secret way of going about it. 468 One could not just voluntarily or choose to be part of it, you had to be selected. 469 This makes sense, because you had to be trusted as communication was vital to the former political prisoners, they were isolated and restricted from political news and activities, therefore secret communication was a dangerous act and if they were caught they would be badly punished. 470 This however, also shows that were excluded around secret communication.

Another technique that was used by the former political prisoners was the usage of match boxes. The match boxes were a means of communicating with one another secretly. As mentioned previously the prison cells were designed in such a way that separated prisoners from one another. 471 Therefore those in the single cells were separated from those in the general cells. However according to Mandela they thought of it as their duty to be in contact with the men in F and G the cells where the general prisoners were kept. 472 During the walks to the quarry Mandela writes that Mac and Kathy began to notice empty matchboxes which

464 Ibid, 94.
465 Ibid, 96-97
466 Ibid, 96-97.
467 Interview with G.S on 25 September 2015.
469 Fran Buntman, 'Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid', 96-97
471 Buntman, Resistance, 40.
were being tossed away by warders and they began to secretly collect them. It was Mac’s idea to create a false bottom to the box and place tiny messages into it. Laloo Chiba was given the duty to write tiny coded messages that were placed into the converted matchbox. The match boxes were dropped at strategic crossings by Joe Gqabi where they knew general prisoners would walk. Those in general cells knew about this method as it was made known to them by means of whispered conversations at food deliveries. Those in the single cells would retrieve messages in the same fashion of the match box.\textsuperscript{473} This was one of the many ways they created in order to communicate to one another.

Furthermore, G.S says that even though he was not involved in secret communication on the Island, he will tell me what he knows. Fascinatingly G.S explained to me that some former political prisoners would use the job duties as a means to continue with underground activities, meaning secret communication. He gave a list of such jobs which were used as an opportunity for secret communication or underground activities. The painting span (team), kitchen span, reception, where they made tea and cleaned the reception, those who worked in the hospital and plumbers. Since they could go into any section when there was a problem with the pipe.\textsuperscript{474} The above argument that former political prisoner used the job duties as an opportunity for secret communication is supported by Kathrada. According to Kathrada, Mac Maharaj, Laloo Chiba, Samson Fadana and Lionel Davis were part the paint squad when the Island was being repainted.\textsuperscript{475} While they were part of the painting team they were able to observe that the warders had placed all their confiscated items in the library which was near their cells. As painters, they were able to retrieve a good amount of the confiscated material, which they wrapped in plastic and placed it in the drums of paint they used.\textsuperscript{476} Interestingly, they needed a place to hide these things in times of raids. I will emphasise once again that the former political prisoners were extremely clever and creative. This is proven by the fact that Jafta ‘Jeff’ Masemola made false bottoms and secret compartments for some of the stools in their cells. Therefore during raids the smuggled and the confiscated materials were well hidden away in the ‘hidey-holes’ that were well crafted.\textsuperscript{477}

Another example when former political prisoners used their job duties as an opportunity to partake in underground activities or secret communication is the time when those prisoners

\textsuperscript{473}Ibid, 499.
\textsuperscript{474}Interview with G.S on 25 September 2015.
\textsuperscript{475}Kathrada, Memoirs, 247.
\textsuperscript{476}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{477}Ibid.
who were responsible for cleaning the toilets would hide the stolen or smuggled newspaper in the clean toilet and retrieve it the next morning.\textsuperscript{478} Furthermore, the former political prisoners who worked in the kitchen used it as an advantage to smuggle messages to the other cells, communicate with another while delivering the food etc. According to Buntman, despite the fact that different sections were designed in a way to separate the prisoners and prevent their communication they still found methods to break through the divisions in order to facilitate communication.\textsuperscript{479} Buntman says that one of the common methods that were used to communicate secretly was the method of wrapping messages in plastic bags and placing them in the drums of food that went through the kitchen that was served to the entire prison.\textsuperscript{480} Therefore, the kitchen was also one of the main means that was used to distribute information and communicate with one another. In addition, Nelson Mandela has written that the men who delivered their drums of food were from the general section. They started off using it to their advantage by having whispered conversations, where they were able to convey brief messages. Later on, they worked out a scheme where the comrades from the general section who worked in the kitchen began to place letters and notes in plastic at the bottom of the food drums. The men in the single cells would send return communications in a similar way, by wrapping the notes in the same plastic and then placing them at the back of the pile of dirty dishes that were then taken back to the kitchen. Mandela says that they would do their best to create a mess and scatter food all over the plates. The warders complained about the mess, but they never investigated.\textsuperscript{481}

Another strategy that was used to get information or messages in and out of prison was during visitation and letters, as Vincent Diba explained during my interview with him that codes were created to communicate with outside world and that this was done through letters.\textsuperscript{482} The strategy of codes were not only limited to letters. Nelson Mandela says that during visitation one would create code names for people to get information about certain things. He says that the warders’ ignorance would work in their favour, as it allowed them to create code names for people they wanted to talk about and when warders would ask who that is, they would just explain it was a family member. This type of strategy was time consuming

\textsuperscript{478}Eddie Daniels, \textit{There and Back}, 164.
\textsuperscript{479}Ibid, 40.
\textsuperscript{480}Ibid, 40-41.
\textsuperscript{481}Nelson Mandela, \textit{Long Walk to Freedom}, 499.
\textsuperscript{482}Interview with Vincent Diba on 2 October 2015.
due to the limited time they had to spend with visitors and warders interruptions when they 
heard an unfamiliar name, however information still got across.\(^\text{483}\)

The reason I have argued that secret communication led to miscommunication is because Robben Island as a place of imprisonment for former political prisoners was very isolated. As seen above former political prisoners were faced with numerous restrictions which prevented them from communicating legally and openly. Therefore they relied heavily on news that was brought in from the outside, among prisoners, smuggled information, newspapers etc. e.g. Kathrada mentions in his autobiography how they used the new arrival on Island to find out the latest news and activities that occurred in the outside world.\(^\text{484}\) Almost all the information or news they received was from what they heard and many times were described as rumours. As Nelson Mandela says that they were diligent in gathering news and information, but their knowledge of current events was always sketchy. Due to the fact that they dependent on what they heard by others which were first in the form of a rumour and only later they were confirmed by a newspaper account or outside visitor.\(^\text{485}\) There were no guarantee that the news they received were hundred percent accurate, or whether smuggled information that went to the outside world was received.

For instance, as it has been made clear above letters that were received by prisoners as well as letters in which prisoners sent out were censored. Which means it caused a lot of confusion, miscommunication and misinterpretation. Many of which has broken up families, caused many distress and psychological pain.\(^\text{486}\) As previously mentioned Vincent Diba said that many times they thought the letters they have sent out to families or friends were delivered, only to find that later about twenty years when they have been released they received that same letter in which they thought families members have ignored, while in the meantime they haven’t even been sent the letter. An example of the non-communication dangers is spoken about in the autobiography of Jama Matakata. He says that the authorities truly wanted to break down prisoners physically and psychologically, this is evident when mentioned that many times family members were faced with restrictions which enabled them to visit either by authorities or personal, and many former political prisoners felt disappointed when visitors did not pitch on the allocated date. They felt like their friends and family deserted them and did not care about them enough. Even when they found out the truth about why family or


\(^{486}\)Jama Matakata, *Hills of Hope*, 76
friends never came it did not help, the harm was already done. This is non-communication dangers because the political prisoners never heard from their loved ones and there were reasons for this. However former political prisoners also had their own assumptions which caused a lot of harm in their lives.

The most interesting examples of how secret communication leads to miscommunication and non-communication consequences is the escape plan by Eddie Daniels. He had strategized, planned and developed an escape for Mandela and Sisulu. Daniels noticed helicopters flying over the Island and they had large baskets or net attached to their underbellies which he assumed contained suppliers for the tanker. He says that it was the basket that increases the possibility of a successful escape plan in his mind. Once Daniels determined the best route to success he dreamt of the plan day and night, it was his obsession. Nelson Mandela showed keen interest in the plan, but he said that he first wanted to address it to the ANC’s High organ in prison, they approved, but on the condition that it should be submitted to the ANC High Command in exile for the final approval as well as execution. Walter Sisulu said that he thought it was best if Nelson Mandela went alone, as he did not think they both could go. The plan was initiated for New Year’s morning in 1981. Daniels was being released on 16 November 1979, which would have given him enough time to report to the High Command in exile. Also on New Year’s Day in the morning they were shown a film and all the warders on duty in their section would join them, they were able to move around more freely on that day. It was also visiting day and warders would have to be on duty at the visiting booth from 9 am and the time for the escape was to be at 9:15 am. The escape plan was set and on the Island he had discussed the plan thoroughly with Nelson Mandela. They had to wait for the approval and the execution of the plan to be made by the High Command of the ANC in exile and for this to happen a secret meeting was arranged for Daniels to meet the ANC’s president Oliver ‘O.R’ Tambo in Botswana. Unfortunately, when Eddie Daniels was released he had many banning restrictions which prevented him from moving freely. He decided to come up with another plan to get the Letter to Oliver ‘O.R’ Tambo which included asking his trusted

487 Ibid, 77.
488 Eddie Daniels, There and back, 211.
489 Ibid.
490 Ibid, 212-213
491 Ibid, 213.
friend Moira Henderson to take something very confidential o Randolph Vigne in London.  

Eddie Daniels says that:

“I set out the plan, in tiny writing, on very thin tracing paper. I then found a postcard with a scenic view of Table Mountain on it, and mounted it on fairly thick cardboard, which overlapped the sides of the postcard. I hollowed out the mounting and placed the plan, folded and flattened, in the hollow. Then I struck another price of cardboard in the back. However, when I held it up to the light, I could still see the hollowed section. I added yet another mount, and this effectively hid the plan from any prying eyes”.  

Cleverly, Eddie Daniels addressed the post card to Randolph’s wife, Gillian and they gave it to Moira to give to him. At the same time, he wrote to Randolph, in which he asked him to pass the postcard to Nelson’s ‘brother-in-law’ (Nelson and O.R had been partners in their own law firm). Daniels also gave the instructions that O.R should treat the postcard in the same manner he had treated the photo album. This is one of the methods they had used to smuggled messages in the past, where they would pack pages of closely written script in the covers of a photograph album. He said that he knew O.R would understand this reference. Furthermore, Randolph had figured out who Nelson’s ‘brother-in-law’ was and he delivered the postcard. However, Daniels said that, that was the last he had heard of the plan for 13 years. He had many assumptions as why this was the case, such as either the High Command had turned it down, or O.R had misunderstood the reference to the photo album and treated it just as a postcard. The horribleness of this was that he has received no-communication and no feed-back from the High Command, which has ended all escape plan ideas and left them confused. However, the High Command had received the escape plan, but while they were studying it, they found out that there was to be an impending South African Defence Force raid and had to destroy all important documents. However Connie Braam who was part of the Dutch Ant-Apartheid Movement, was present and rescued Daniels escape plan from being destroyed.  

It is clear from above that Eddie Daniels and the rest had brilliant strategic secret communication methods and skills. The escape plan itself was amazingly well organised and planned. The discussions that went on regarding the plan with Nelson Mandela and other former political prisoners who were included into the discussion, were all done in secret on

494Ibid, 216.  
495Ibid, 216-217.
the Island, without the warders knowing what was going on. However, even though they had these amazing secretive strategies, miscommunication as well and no-communication danger still came into place as the plan could not have been carried out without the approval of the ANC’s High Command in exile. If it was not for Connie Braam, Eddie Daniels and the rest would have still been misled to believe their own assumptions to why they have not received an approval from the High Command.

This chapter has dealt with secret communication, it has focused on how secret communication has brought upon a sense of community and unity. Also it has show how important secret communication was for former political prisoners and how they developed strategies to communicate, smuggle and gain information and news despite the extreme restrictions and restraints they were faced with. This chapter has shown that secret communication was a form of underground activities and that there were many strategies developed, but only a few were discussed such as the stealing, smuggling and importance of newspapers, matchboxes, underground and communication committees and secret codes. Importantly this chapter has focused on the negative aspects of secret communication as well, which is miscommunication and no-communication dangers and consequences.

CONCLUSION

My research aims for this research paper was to look at the Island between the 1960s and 1980s in terms of how political prisoners found ways to survive and constitute themselves as a community. This essay focuses specifically on communication and how prisoners communicated with one another as well as with the outside world, despite being restricted and incarnated. Therefore, I have focused on different forms of communication, such as those between warders and prisoners and how prisoners communicated generally and secretly to one another. This research, aims to contribute to the understanding of communication on Robben Island during the time of political imprisonment and this would then further add to our understanding of Robben Island as a world heritage site.

Importantly the research question is; there were many restrictions that political prisoners had to face on Robben Island. They were isolated and continuously guarded. They were abused, humiliated and their freedom was taken away from them. Warders tried to break down their spirits and morale and tried to take away their humanity. How did prisoners then survive it all? Could it be argued that communication helped them survive? But even their freedom to communicate was stripped away from them. How did these prisoners then develop a sense of
‘secret communication’ and a community, despite the restrictions placed on them by the authorities?

It is evident from the above that this research paper has brought both the research aim and research question justice. This research paper has shown that former political prisoners were creative and they never gave up no matter what their circumstances were. There is no doubt that there were many times that they felt despondent or felt like giving up, questioning whether it was all worth it. However, many of them conquered it due to the support they had and gave one another, knowingly that some are weaker than others. The stronger ones would try to uplift and strengthen the weaker ones. During my research I have found it amazing learning and reading about how they worked underground even in prison on Robben Island. They continued with their political organizations in prison, having discussions, lessons and debated without the warders finding out. Importantly under the organizations there were many other different structures, one being the communication committees. Those in charge and selected to be part of that committee would find ingenious ways to communicate to the other sections on the Island as well as the outside world. It was important for former political prisoners to find out what was happening outside and to know whether or not the fight against apartheid is still continuing while they were inside of prison. Therefore, newspapers were an important source for them and as seen above, they would risk their lives just to get their hands on a newspaper. Former political prisoners developed many strategies to communicate in secret by using underground methods and only a few of many have been discussed above.

Therefore, in relation to my finding above, I would argue that secret communication helped former political prisoners survive on Robben Island. If they never resisted the restrictions they were faced on the Island, such as living in isolation, not communicating etc. they would have died. They needed one another, they needed those discussions, they needed their organizations, and they needed to steal newspapers, smuggle in and out information, have coded messages to visitors. They needed it all in order to realise that not even their imprisonment will stop them from fighting and that all of their struggle for freedom will not be in vain.

It is also clear from the above that in terms of communication, they were also faced with harsh words and treatment from warders which was meant to break them and tear them apart. This shows that despite the fact that they found strategic methods of secret communication which helped them survive and even formed a sense of community. They were faced with
negativity and daily challenges which were constantly aimed at making them give up on their fight.

Another negative aspect with secret communication is that it led to miscommunication. Due to the fact that there was hardly anything that former political prisoners could do openly. Therefore, as Vincent Diba said everything they did was in secret, and therefore there were many miscommunications. Such as the censored letters which would be wrongly interpreted and which left many hearts broken. The escape plan that never happened also left many assumptions, miscommunications and confusions. This also shows that non-communication also had consequences. Also everything or most of the things former political prisoner knew was from things they have heard from others, therefore I have argued that even when passing on information verbally many things could have been changed, certain important parts left out and passed on wrongly.

Reflecting back to my interviews, many of the things in which both my interviewees have said in the interview corresponded with my findings in which I have read. They were either the same information or closely linked. However, there was new information I have obtained as well. Such as ’six-9 communication’, I have not discussed this in my research paper, but it is basically a form of secret communication. For an example, communicating through the toilet, the reason I have not spoken about this is because Diba explained this experience which only happened at Pollsmoor. Furthermore, G.S made me aware of the selection process, and that not anyone was part of the communication committee. My interviews helped me greatly and they contributed by being closely linked to the autobiographies and bibliographies in which I used as well as having only a few things in which I was unaware of.
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Abstract: For this paper, I write as a member of Burning Museum. I will engage with the seeming contradiction embedded in the name of the collective, and seek to unpack the question ‘Why a Burning Museum?’ What kind of assertions are being made about traditional museum practices through ephemeral, site-specific artworks that draw on archives? How does digitization intersect with ephemerality and conservation?

Figure 24 “Visible is Ephemeral” by French street artist Zevs. Paris, France.
“Rhodes must fall!” “All Rhodes lead to the colonisation of the mind”, read slogans in massive crowds of supporters of the #Rhodesmustfall movement. The monument has been disgraced and defaced with shit, paint, paper and plastic. The month long defacement of the monument that led to the removal of Cecil Rhodes, is a significant step in dealing with the omnipotence of oppressive heritage that has characterised the South African heritage landscape. During this period, a group of Afriforum white Afrikaner men mobilised to protect the Paul Kruger Monument, a man who to many, is viewed as an oppressor and guardian of white privilege. The assertions of both #Rhodesmustfall and Afriforum speak to the historical imbalances that are tangibly present in the of South Africa. It has opened up a conversation about the production of heritage, and the tension between present visibility and historical
invisibility. Colonial monuments have been confronted with a critique. The dead and the untold are beginning to speak loudly and clearly in a post apartheid South Africa. They raise a number of questions around heritage, memorialisation and visibility. How do we remember an oppressive past? What should be remembered? Addressing the imbalances and the injustices that characterise the heritage landscape are democratic concerns. It is from these tensions around the production of heritage, that I will explore the arts collective Burning Museum⁴⁹⁶.

Burning Museum describes itself as:

“The Burning Museum (BM) is a collaborative interdisciplinary collective rooted in Cape Town, South Africa. The space which we find ourselves in is one which has been scarred and seared by a historical trajectory of violent exclusions and silences. These histories form the foundation of an elusive and at times omnipotent democracy that occasionally reveals its muscle in the form of laws and by-laws in public space. It is from this historical climate and present context that the work of the Burning Museum engages with themes such as history, identity, space, and structures. We are interested in the seen and unseen, the stories that linger as ghosts on gentrified street corners; in opening up and re-imagining space as potential avenues into the layers of history that are buried within, under, and between.”⁴⁹⁷

Burning Museum is an interdisciplinary arts collective that ‘curate’ the historical and present architectural boundaries of the city with archival imaginings. Burning Museum exists in parallel spaces namely: they studio, the street, and the gallery. The city and its public spaces, the gallery and its walls become the framework for the display of archival representations. The black and white images that we paste up extend from Woodstock, Elsies River, Hangberg, Bonteheuwel, Bellville, to various galleries. Burning Museum emerged in 2013, primarily working in the medium of wheatpasting. Wheatpaste refers to the glue that we make use of to stick up large scale images. We refer to these images as ‘burns’. The city spaces, both public and private are central to the location of our work. Our work can be described as site-specific and ephemeral. Our work is not meant to last forever. Rather, the representations we create travel through the spaces of the city, the studio, and in the digital realm.

⁴⁹⁶ I am a member of the Burning Museum.

⁴⁹⁷ https://burningmuseum.wordpress.com
For this paper, I write as a member of Burning Museum. The course has given me insight into the heritage debates both on and off the continent. It has been a continuous sense making experience in relation to my practise within Burning Museum. I will engage with the seeming contradiction embedded in the name of the collective, and seek to unpack the question ‘Why a Burning Museum?’ What is a museum? What kind of ideological assertions are being made about traditional museum practices through ephemeral, site-specific artworks that draw on archives? Lastly, how does digitization intersect with ephemerality and conservation?

**A note on method**

As a member of Burning Museum, I draw on my own experiences and conversations with other members. My own experiences include working on all the projects that Burning Museum has engaged with since 2013 - 2015. Some of these experiences will be presented through the paper in the first person as moments around which weave into larger heritage and street art debates. In addition to this, I make use of interviews with Burning Museum to present other members ideas and responses. I draw heavily on the course structure’s prescribed reading to connect with street art/public art discourse. The paper follows the format of being both text and image based. The aim of this is to bring a visual conversation into the textual one, thereby adding another layer of engagement.

**Historical Overview:**

In this section, I sketch a historical backdrop of the emergence and migration of the concept of the museum. From the literature, I will argue the historical emergence of the museum was premised on a particular conception of a utopian temporality. I will suggest that the utopian ordering of the world embedded in the production of the museum, reflected a Eurocentric imagining and desire. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett illustrates in “The Museum--A Refuge for Utopian Thought”; “The museum is at once an architectural form, a concrete environment for reflection, a reservoir of tangibilities, a school for the senses, a space of conviviality, an autopoetic system, and a projection of the ideal society.”

Drawing on Michel Foucault’s “Utopias and Heterotopias”, Foucault asserts, “The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history...” The spectrum of utopian desire and historical obsession emerge during the economic and political development of the nation

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498 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1

499 Foucault, 1
state. This, I argue is an inherent temporal contradiction that underpins the museum in the colonial project and the apartheid project. Challenging this, I suggest that new museums that emerge in a post apartheid society present temporal and ideological challenges to traditional museums with colonial legacies.

The museum and the colonial project

The wonder of cabinets of curiosities displayed in the homes for and by the wealthy and elite formed the foundation of the museum and the art fair. Possessing a cabinet or rarities was a display of a “larger socio cultural movement” which “adhered to a unified perception of the world.”\(^{500}\) It represented an experienced person of the world. It could be argued that this status, was refracted later in the public museum that created new publics, and new relationships of people and state. Stuart Hall further suggests; “Museums could therefore reconcile curiosity and scholarship, private and public domains, the whimsical and the ordered.” In this sense, the opening of the museum to a broader public, encompassed an intersection of utopian desires, historical obsessions, and state disciplinary mechanisms. It was the discipline and construction of a new citizenship.

Tony Bennet’s “The Exhibitionary Complex”, complicates the notion of the museum in the 19th century, by paralleling it development with Foucault’s analysis of the transformation of the prison system. Bennet suggests; “Museums may have enclosed objects within walls, but the nineteenth century saw their doors opened to the general public - witnesses whose presence was just as essential to a display of power as had been that of the people before the spectacle of punishment in the eighteenth century.”\(^{501}\) Bennet compares the ‘institutions of confinement’ (prisons) with ‘institutions of exhibition’ (e.g. Museums). Bennet shows how the museum that emerged in the 19th century operated as a disciplinary mechanism. The understood central argument of ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’, is that unlike the privatisation of the public spectacle of execution, the museum became a public ‘permanent’ exhibition of ‘power and knowledge’. It arranged and organised an ideal Eurocentric society for public viewing. Similar to the photochemical process of the camera; the museums created a sense of “optical consistency”\(^{502}\). It presented Eurocentric optical illusions as objective facts of the

\(^{500}\)Lidchi, 158

\(^{501}\)Bennet, 335

\(^{502}\)Behrend
world. Relating this back to the exhibitionary complex, the image-as-facts that museums presented, could be viewed as an aesthetic surface of a complex of disciplinary technologies. Bennet suggest that; “through the provision of object lessons of power - the power to command and arrange things and bodies for public display - they sought to allow the people, and en masse rather than individually, to know rather than be known, to become subjects rather than objects...” The museum then, became a space for power to be known, to be exercised through what was made visible, through seeing and being seen, to accept the utopian/ideal society and the spectators place in it as a subject and citizen. Locating this in an African context, the privileging of Europeans as subjects, ‘natives’ ‘primitives’ could be constructed as binary opposite objects. Here, disciplines such as anthropology emerge to document, display, and preserve ‘otherness’ in the form of the ethnographic museum.

The ethnographic museum played an instrumental role in constructing otherness as objects to be studies. This was underpinned by racial assumptions of superiority and inferiority, always privileging the European as a subject, and the pinnacle of the civilised, civilisation. A set of representations were presented to the public. Representations of Africans took the shape of human zoos, and dioramas. Additionally, the displays excluded the method of ‘collection’, veiling the power dynamics and violence of collecting and displaying black bodies in dioramas frozen in and out of time. Black bodies were also categorised as natural history objects, never subjects. This representation that was presented to a European public and later transplanted on African soil, reflected a Eurocentric ideal. It seemed in the ideal society, everyone was frozen in a utopian time capsule. Some were moving through the time, progressing as citizens, while others were stuck in time.

The museum and the apartheid project

The trend to display which exhibited black bodies as specimens, was a concept that travelled with the colonial project to South Africa. Patricia Davison presents the problems of display in her article “Typecast: Representations of the Bushman at the South African Museum”, ‘it is the grouping of ethnography with natural history that reinforces stereotypes’. In this sense, the cleavages of civilised citizen and almost extinct specimen were transplanted into the local contexts of colonisation, in the shape of the museum. Relating this to Tony Bennet’s

503 Bennet, 335

504 Davison,
argument that the museum was an apparatus of vision that disciplined, regulated, and created a public in the 19th century, the museum in a South African context, constructed a racial hierarchy of the public. It was another method of enforcing and regulating racial boundaries.

In the case of the South African Museum, the display of Africans evident in the Bushman diorama, as natural history presents people as specimens, as objects to be viewed. Heike Behrend illustrates in “Contesting Visibility”, that there is an ideological assertion embedded in the colonial lense. That; “Linear perspective was inscribed into the photographic camera, which produced permanent images on a mass scale, thereby (re)-exporting linear perspective as part of colonization...”505 It is this linear perspective that characterises the Eurocentric hierarchical evolutionary scale which materialises itself in dioramas and freak shows. It circulates in a visual economy that is underpinned by a Eurocentric utopia.

The construction of the museum in South Africa coincides with the political economic transformations within the state. This appears similar to what Bennet suggest about the museum as a disciplinary apparatus of an emerging nation state. However, the feature which characterises the museum in South Africa is that it was imprinted with eugenicist notions of race. This served a political purpose of tailoring the colonial ideal to the specific needs of white supremacist notions of race. The Bushman diorama continued to be displayed and exoticised by tourists and tour operators post apartheid. The violence of the process of casting /Xam prisoners for the diorama were invibilised to the viewer. This could be argued as the residues of the historical state display of violence.

The museum and democracy

Presently, a rock art exhibition occupies a new area of SAM as a means of addressing the violence of the diorama. However, the rock art exhibition remains within the walls of natural history and not the National gallery. Traditional museums such as Iziko had to create a new public. Since, as Schumaker and McGregor illustrate in “Heritage in Southern Africa”, “controversy over public representations of the past has fostered a range of self-conscious efforts to create displays and experiences more suited to postcolonial and post-apartheid contexts.”506 One which reflected democratic ideals, as illustrated by ACTAG to “conserve, promote and revitalise our national cultural heritage so that it is accessible to all

505Behrend, 2013.
506McGregor and Schumaker, 649
communities. Historical and cultural collections, resources and sites must fully reflect the many components of our cultural heritage and, in particular, neglected and suppressed aspects of our people's culture must be conserved."  

This reflected a concerted effort by the newly elected democratic state to address the historical imbalances of the past through symbolic reconciliation and restitution. In the same way that the 19th century European nation state required a new public and a new citizen, so does a democratic state. Thus, new publics were created in the reconstitution of historical narratives. Museums with colonial legacies had to address their displays and collections. Parallel to this, new museums, such as the District 6 Museum and The Robben Island Museum (RIM), began to emerge on the heritage landscape. Robben Island was declared a national museum and world heritage site. It was and continues to be (although for a tourist public), a political pilgrimage of freedom. RIM concretised a narrative of the new nation. The District 6 Museum emerged in the 1980’s and established itself officially in December 1994. Its establishment coincided with the transition from apartheid to democracy. The special character of the District 6 Museum lies within its ‘usual development’. As Many Sanger suggests in “Orientation to District 6 and Communities”.

“Unusual for museums, it built a movement around its work and the exhibition still reflects the collaborative processes of involving writers, artists, intellectuals, ex-residents and political activists.” Sanger goes further to say; “Storytelling and performance of memory took on the form of social mobilisation that resulted in the Museum’s reframing of notions of community, exhibition and museology by starkly bringing to the fore issues relating to intangible heritage.”  

This suggests an alternative museum practice that is born from the experience of exclusion and oppression of apartheid. This practise includes storytelling and collaboration as core principles of the museum. It challenges dominant discourses of museum practices and opens up a possibility to re-imagine the potential of a museum in a post-apartheid society. This, contrasts with the role of the museum in both the colonial and apartheid project. Instead of perpetuating an ideal of a linear utopian society, the District 6 Museum actively collaborated on creating a displaced, disrupted community as the public. The Museum’s ongoing education role with young people also ensures an active engagement with a different generation that did not experience the removals first hand. In this way, the District 6 Museum questions the colonial utopia’s embodied in traditional museums, through engagements with people as knowledge holders and interpreters. It is the flexibility and self

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507 ACTAG,

508 Sanger, 7
reflective critiques that continue to make the District 6 Museum a top knowledge producer. The success of the District 6 Museum would become a methodological model for other initiatives and museums such as the Lwandle Migrant Museum.

The museum is a colonial concept embedded with a Eurocentric ideal. From its inception in Europe, to its migration to South Africa; the museum served to discipline, order, and reinforce a racial hierarchy. Contrasting to this, are post-apartheid museums such as the District 6 Museum and the Robben Island Museum. Both world renowned museums have actively sought to address the colonial legacies of museums, by privileging narratives that have been historically hidden or politically suppressed. Yet, both museums are faced with their own set of challenges. In the case of Robben Island, the museum struggles to negotiate a balance of tourism and heritage. The District 6 Museum faces a different set of issues that accompany an independent museum. Funding challenges raise a number of difficulties for the museum and limits the scope of the work that the museum can presently engage in. Despite this, District 6 manages to remain reflexive and critical of its museum practise. It has remained open to critique and dialogue which is and has been its ideological strength. The above historical overview locates the museum historically to develop an argument about the politicised ways that heritage is produced. At the core of its inception is a prejudiced Eurocentric discourse. Paradoxically, the colonial museum appears as a display of European progress, embracing time, and objective. Yet, its constructs a sense of temporality that fixes, closes, and attempts to preserve. It is this contradiction that I will explore in the section that follows by focussing on Burning Museum.

City Narrations’

“Whether the street works seem utopian or anarchic, aggressive or sympathetic, stunningly well-executed or juvenile, original or derivative, most street artists seriously working in the genre begin with a deep identification and empathy with the city: they are compelled to state something in and with the city... A well placed street piece will reveal the meaning of its material context, making the invisible visible again, a city re-imagined and re-imagined.”509

Burning Museum emerged through a series of discussions with Jarrett Erasmus, Justin Davy, Grant Jurius, and Scott Williams. These discussions took place within the Digital Arts Clubhouse at the Homecoming Centre. It is here that we began a series of meetings to discuss

509Irvine, 3.
making work together. Like the name of the collective, the method and content would emerge organically. Being in the space of the Homecoming centre, yet coming from distant parts of the city we began to talk about our historical distance from the city. The theme of displacement and navigating back into the city were central themes. In these meetings we became interested in the photocopied images that were stacked in boxes and visible on tables in the Digital Arts Clubhouse. We then used these images which led to copyright issues with the museum. This reshaped our ethics as a collective, but opened up a conversation and long standing relationship with the District 6 Museum. This, I will explore more in depth with our first works called “Portraits of Home” 2013. The name Burning Museum emerged organically in the process of making glue to stick work up. The name captured our imagination and opened up a range of possibility for reconciling our present with the omnipotence of our shared feeling of an invisibilised past.

Burning Museum occupies 3 spaces, namely: the street, the studio, and the gallery. We create work in our studio which then travels through either public or private avenues of the city. Most of our work resides on the streets of Cape Town. This extends from Cape Town station to Bellville Station, Woodstock, Elsies River, North Pine, and Hangberg to name a few. We use low tech cost effective methods of creating work, as most of the time we pay for this own our own expense. Our work is our aesthetic historical investment in the city. The work is made of paper and flour-water glue. It is not meant to be preserved. Instead, we allow the work to naturally degrade with time. This makes our work by nature ephemeral and by location street art. Our work is exposed to a passing public. If you see it you see it, if you miss it you miss it. The city and its architecture is our architectural frame for our historical imaginings. Our historical imaginings shape into the form of large scale photostat images that we assemble in blocks. This comes in the form of black and white archival portraits or photo-collages. In the following sections I present 3 moments in Burning Museum.
“Portraits of Home” 2013

Figure 26 Close up image of the 1913 Land Act. Photograph by Burning Museum


It is Sunday, sometime in February. We gather at Greatmore Studios. Music is playing in the background. I can’t remember now what it is now. We assemble and edit our piece that we call “The Boys”. Cut Top. Cut Left. Glue Top. Glue Left.

Figure 27 Process photograph of the assembling process. Photograph by Burning Museum
After an hour a 1.8m by 1.5m wide Van Kalker portrait emerges. It is life sized and layered with many layers of the 1913 Native Land Act. The Act is barely legible. The clue of the text lies in the corner. In another corner, Grant is making the flour, water, sugar glue. It bubbles on the stove while we wait. We prepare for our first work to be placed somewhere in Woodstock. We are unsure where we will place it. The glue is finished, the piece is rolled up, and we leave the studio. We walk down Woodstock Main Road. We notice a narrow alley way called Rhodesia Square. The walls of the street are formed by the side walls of the shops. The unusual proximity of the walls, the name of the street, and the location of Woodstock became an immediate context for the piece ‘The Boys’. We placed the portraits on one wall, and their cut out silhouettes on the other. In this space which is imbued with its own historical cues, combined with the aesthetics of ‘The Boys’, creates a stunning accidental historical conversation about people and place. ‘The Boys’ inserts a narrative of the city, which triggers a new reading of the space through the present. As Irvine suggests “A well placed street piece will reveal the meaning of its material context.”510 The Boys’ speaks directly to invisibilised histories through colonialism and apartheid, while simultaneously commenting on the gentrification process of Woodstock.

510 Irvine,3.
These portraits inspired the continued use of portraits from the Van Kalker residues that we had scavenged from the District 6 Museum. This triggered a number of issues with the District 6 Museum and raised questions about artistic responsibility and ethics of conservation. Below are other images that we put up.
The issues that arose from the use of these portraits was that we had not initially consulted with the District 6 Museum. We had naively used images from a sensitive Van Kalker collection which the Museum was a custodian of. This naivety stemmed from a place of profound loss and familiarity with the images. All of the member in the collective, were directly or indirectly connected to District 6. My grandfather and his family were forcefully removed from District 6. As a collective we had felt that the Van Kalker images were dignified depictions of a history we had been disconnected from, that disrupted the Naspers dominated racial stereotypes. After apologies and discussions with the District 6 Museum, we learnt the responsibility that artists carry when it comes to representations of the past.

We were fortunate enough to solidify a long term relationship with the District 6 Museum, which has been engaging on an artistic and educational level. They, have helped shaped the way we engage with history that has been covered and hidden, while we have in a sense opened up another avenue of memorial practise. We have exchanged methods, particularly with young people that the Museum works with. We had never expected that the work would stir an interest in the way that it did. Most of these works have been removed. That is, besides ‘The Boys’. Almost 4 years later and the piece has developed and degraded.
Figure 30 “The Boy” almost 4 years later. Photograph by Burning Museum
It is 4am Heritage Day. We start our day somewhere along the train line near Bellville Station. We walk through darkness unsure of what awaits us. The grass is long, we silent walk in a line, giggling every now and then. We carry paint drums of glue, and broomsticks with paint brushes attached to them. We begin placing the first piece. In the middle of dripping glue and sticking up the poster. We realise there is a camera directly above us, glaring at us. We continue to put another 3 pieces up. For the rest of the early morning, after a near gun point situation, we slowly work our way along the train line from Bellville to Cape Town putting up work.

Figure 31 “Manufactured” Exhibition. The viewers could only view the work by taking the train. Photograph by Scott Eric Williams.

Figure 32 Work rolled up for the train line. Photograph by Burning Museum.
Figure 33 "Krotoa Women of Cape Town”. Photograph by Burning

Figure 34 “I choose to be a wanderer”. Photograph by Burning Museum
‘Manufactured’ emerged in the context of the celebration of 20 years of democracy. It was inspired by the story of writer, journalist, and exile Nat Nakasa. Nkasa’s story would frame the entire project and the way that we would choose to engage with notions of making and dealing with history. For this project we undertook the train lines as a spatial metaphor, one that moves through time and space, as the vehicle to exhibit our work. We targeted 15 train stations with 35 large-scale images. These images were collages of text, portraits/landscapes from various archives in out reconstruction of an imagined archive. We collaborated with poets and dj’s on topics of dislocation in the form of Nat Nakasa’s short story title “Native of Nowhere”. The ‘exhibition’ was completely illegal.

The concept Manufactured referred to two aspects of heritage. Firstly, it hints to the way that heritage is produced, manufactured, bought and sold. Secondly, the concept refers to a broken narrative. The project was commissioned by various German partners. The idea behind the collaboration was to open up a conversation about the repatriation of human remains and the repatriation of artefacts in South Africa, Benin, and Germany. We were given the task of creating an intervention/exhibition/engagement that would touch on this topic. We approached the theme of repatriation and human remains by expanding our ideas on historical displacement.

The questions around human remains housed in ethnographic collections in Germany was a challenge.

A question that came up through our conceptualisation sessions was, where does one look for historical clues to your past? We tried to extend our vision beyond archival photographs and blended these in a series of 35-40 collages. Coincidentally through research, we discovered that the remains of Nat Nakasa would be returned during the period that we would be creating our activation. We used the stories of Nat Nakasa and his life story as reference point to structure a visual narrative into the city. We divided his story into 3 categories namely; home, exile, and return. We blended Nat Nakasa’s writing with found images. It represented the experience of being taken from by force and forcefully relocated by circumstance. It captured a fragmented historical narrative that many South African share. We placed these manufactured, broken narratives along the train line from Cape Town to Bellville. The train became the mobile metaphor, the train line the narrative, and the commuter the reader of flashing images.
“Cover Version” was a collage conversation that remixed fragments and found objects, particularly covers made by prolific South African photographer, George Hallet. This took place at Gallery MOMO in Cape Town. For this exhibition we were given material by George Hallet that we could work form to make a connection to the present. The images that we received from Hallet were book covers and album covers that he had created in exile. We combined these covers with our own photographs from our work in the street. In conversation with this we had two videos that presented flashing moments, that serves as historical triggers. Together these elements created the context for our work in a gallery space which normally self-evident in a public space.

Figure 35 “Houjoudop” Mixed media collage by Burning Museum.
The exhibitionary moments explored above demonstrate the spaces that Burning Museum occupies. From the street to the gallery, the production of content and work is always an organic process. It shapes and shifts according to our experiences and to the structures of the environment that we find ourselves in. Each space presents its own set of challenges. In the public street space, the legal implications of putting up our aesthetic historical investments is omnipresent and codified in laws and by-laws that regulate how one can engage in public space. As such, most of our work has been removed. Contrasting to this, the gallery space is legally ‘safe’, but artistically dangerous. This is due to the nature of our work which is to stick images directly on walls. This presents a logistical and somewhat preservation issue. Our work ‘dirties’ the white walls and literally have to be scraped off the walls. Our work has to be destroyed in order to be removed. This is a characteristic that both the street space and the gallery space share. In the next section, I will bring together the historical overview of museums with the city narrations of Burning Museum, to the illustrate “Why a Burning Museum”.

Figure 36 “Cover version” Gallery Momo, Cape Town.
Why a Burning Museum?

In the historical overview of museums, I argued that the 19th century museum presented a set of Eurocentric representations of an ideal society. The Eurocentric utopia ordered the world on a racial hierarchy that always privileged the European subject. These ideals would migrate to South Africa, and serve the apartheid interests of creating a racially segregated country that was premised on the pseudoscience of eugenics. These problematic representations were challenged by new museums such as The Robben Island Museum, and the District 6 Museum. The post-apartheid museums opened up the conversation about the ethics of museum practices, and constituted as part of a symbolic restitution process that South Africa was undergoing. ‘Navigating the city’, illustrates the practise of Burning Museum and the spaces which we have occupied. I have hinted at concepts such as ephemerality, space, architecture, narrations, which define our practise in a post apartheid society. From this, I suggest that the utopian ideal is challenged by a fractured community. In the first instance, the 19th century museum veils the obvious utopian temporal contradiction, which seeks to preserve histories in their authentic forms. In the second instance, Burning Museum embraces the ‘contradiction’ of time in its name and practise. We do not seek to preserve, instead we seek to actively reinterpret or remix representations and the occupation of these representations. Then, why a Burning Museum?

“A Burning Museum appeals to me because it holds the promise of a new beginning which I feel most South Africans are desperately waiting/looking for. A chance to start over. A chance to wipe away the pain. To build something new out of the Ashes. There’s something anarchic about the idea as well. Why burn down something which has recorded history albeit history from a certain perspective? surely it must be preserved...I think that’s what the idea of a burning museum does. It brings so many things into question at one time without necessary giving any answers. It invokes the idea of the famous library of Alexandra burning which is seen as a great loss. I think as an artist I am interested in these questions because they can be explored with much more freedom than didactic answers.”

Justin Davy, Burning Museum. 2015

“I think the museum should be about the people and encourage interest in art, history and heritage.” Grant Jurius, Burning Museum. 2015
“The museum is a space that archives histories, allowing us to engage in multiple historical narratives all housed in a single space making history accessible. It becomes tricky when one considers which histories are being retold in these institutions and how these stories are being told, from whose perspective, because like it or not the modern museum is still a colonial institution conceived from colonial rules. For us the idea of retelling how our own history has unfolded is very important. It is important to re-imagine our own position within this historical narrative and convey it back to our people in our own way so the "Burning" metaphor when one considers the museum implies that we're changing from the old structure of how a museum works and re-imagining it working anew to better serve our stories in history that could bring dignity back to our communities.”

Jarrett Erasumus, Burning Museum. 2015

The present and the representation of our history and place within it, has been and continues to be a reflexive impetus that grounds our work. We are always pivoting between the past and the present, trying to reconcile our historical narrative and our personal experiences of dislocation. We draw heavily on remixing a method of reconciling this positionality. Our work is not meant to provide a fixed captioned answer, instead it is meant to ask questions. In this sense, I describe the work of Burning Museum as spatial and temporal provocation that questions the politics of representation within our geographical locality of Cape Town. The contradiction in the name of the collective is reflective of our post apartheid space that we occupy. Cape Town, a city of hope and storms, of natural beauty and persistent segregation; contrasts and contradictions constitute the historical and present landscape. Then, the concept of Burning Museum, of addressing and reconciling the past through the architecture of the present reflects the space, and our historical experience through our material reality. As Martin Irvine eloquently illustrates; “By the early 1990s, street art was the ghost in the urban machine becoming self-aware and projecting its repressed dreams and fantasies onto walls and vertical architecture, as if the visible city were the skin or exoskeleton of something experienced like a life form in need of aesthetic CPR.”511 The city is central to our historical imaginings. ‘Portraits of Home’ and ‘Manufractured’ insert historical narratives into the landscape. It makes another reading of the space possible. It creates unique moments for a passing public to engage in images that they may or may not be familiar with. The images are

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cues to a past. The reception of these images is unpredictable. Some have been vandalised and others have been moments of nostalgia.

The above image was taken moments after we had put up the piece. A man who was passing by, lived in this street depicted on the wall. After he had helped us put it up, he sat on his own fixing the tear marks talking to the image. His home was in that street.

Encounters such as the one above, reveals the potential of placing street provocations. It opens up the archive to people that would not ordinarily go to a museum. It also speaks to the locality of heritage that is it embedded in the concrete and stone of everyday spaces. Images such as this, and our previous work interrupt the seeming historical vacancy. As Martin Irvine suggest in “Work on the Street” that street art is “a form at once local and global, post-photographic, post-Internet, and post-medium, intentionally ephemeral but now documented almost obsessively with digital photography for the Web, constantly appropriating and remixing imagery, styles, and techniques from all possible sources. It’s a community of practice.”

The community includes the people who pass by street art.

Figure 37 “Future Museum” as part of the annual Art Walk. Photograph by Burning Museum.

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Tim Liebbrandt’s article “Covers and Remixs in Recent South African Art”, focusses on “the spate of South African exhibitions this year (including exhibitions by Kemang WaLehulere, Burning Museum, Athi-PatraRuga and LizzaLittlewort) which have used acts of quotation, reinterpretation and re-presentation to pay homage or offer pointed critique”\textsuperscript{513} Leibbrandt locates the centrality of music terms such as cover versions and remixes at this particular historical moment in South Africa. The occurrence of remixing within contemporary art in South Africa reflects an ideological shift towards critically making sense of our relation to the past. It is interplay between what has been historically hidden and what is presently visible. The question of visibility and invisibility also invokes the concept of the digital, of the establishment of new visual economies made possible through the internet.

Social media is another important space which Burning Museum occupies. Our facebook and blog have become our own archival system for our work. In addition to this, it has become another platform to engage with a global audience. Irvine suggests; “Street art works by being confrontationally material and location-specific while also participating in the global, networked, Web-distributable cultural encyclopaedia.”\textsuperscript{514} In this sense, Burning Museum is both tangible and intangible.

**Concluding Remarks**

The question ‘Why a Burning Museum’ can be taken in many directions. For this paper, I have tried to locate the collective within the broader historical context of museums and within the present heritage landscape of South Africa. I have suggested that historically museums have embodied particular Eurocentric contradictions which have been masked under the guise of positivist seeming objective observations. Burning Museum embodies its own set of selected contradictions which we do not hide. Rather, we embrace the contradiction of preservation and destruction, ephemerality and conservation, tangibility and intangibility. We provoke questions not provide answers.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{513}Leibbrandt, 1.
\textsuperscript{514} Irvine, 4
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