

**'HERITAGE' AND THE ARRIVAL OF POST-COLONIAL HISTORY IN
SOUTH AFRICA**

BY

PROF ANDRE ODENDAAL

**(Honorary Professor of History and Heritage Studies, University of
the Western Cape).**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper was first presented as a keynote address to the South African Historical Association Annual Conference on “*Heritage Creation a Research: The Restructuring of Historical Studies in Southern Africa*” held at the Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg on 24-26 June 2002.

Speaking to academic historians after a five years absence from a university campus, while heavily occupied in the building and management of a new historical institution, rather than concentrated research and reflection, I approached the address with some trepidation.

At the same time I was confident that a new era had dawned in which the public history and heritage domain, which I had been involved in for 17 years, could claim a place alongside ‘academic’ history as an integral part of the broad field of critical South African historical studies.

The Honorary Professorship awarded to me by the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in December 2001, carrying the title Professor of History and Heritage Studies, helped underline this point.

From the time in the 1980s that new popular and public history approaches (re)emerged, many academic historians have been uncomfortable with, even disdainful towards what they have seen as politically biased and shallow engagements with and depictions of the past.

However, the terrain has changed rapidly in the last ten years. Academic historians have had to engage more with the changing political, cultural, economic and intellectual trends accompanying South African democracy, new international power arrangements and intensifying economic globalisation, with its accompanying information revolution, than they, perhaps, would have liked.

The debate today, I believe, is not so much about whether or not academic historians recognise and engage with these new directions, but how they do so, and what the critical intellectual and political challenges involved are.

Indeed, it appears that heritage is one of the main vehicles for the establishment of post-colonial history structures and expressions in South Africa.

In this address, I will i) outline some recent developments in the formal public history/heritage sphere in South Africa, sharing something of its scale and intellectual substance; ii) indicate some of the challenges and opportunities that this field provides for academic historians in South Africa today; and iii) share some perspectives on the issues of race, rewriting and power which remain searing topics in the academic history profession.¹

I will do so in a discursive way, using my personal intellectual journey as a reference. I make no claims to weighty analysis here. This is work-in-progress, a toe-in-the-water starting point to inscribe unique experiences and work at University of the Western Cape and Robben Island Museum in the past decade and a half into the history of historical production in South Africa – the new historiography that Witz, Minkley and Rassool wrote about in 1999². Also, to share insights learned in this journey with an academic audience.

As the main academic reference points for this discussion, I have used three academic works by three seasoned historians, John Wright, Tim Nuttal and Albert Grundlingh.³ I took them as a departure point because of the respect I hold these scholars in, personally and professionally; where this engagement with their writing leads to critiques and differences of opinion, the respect and debt to them remains.

Comments from participants at this conference which could assist me to tighten up and finalise my arguments will be welcomed.

1. NEW TERRAINS OF HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1985-2002

There have always been dynamic historical analysis and practices outside of formal academic history departments and universities. From the beginning, the struggle against racial domination and apartheid was posited on alternate liberal, nationalist and materialist analyses of history. The lineage goes back to the first writings in Xhosa by Tiyo Soga and others from the 1860s onwards, followed by later Communist Party, Unity Movement and ANC writings, which have been well documented already and which predated and sometimes influenced the university-based liberal Africanist and revisionist writings of the 1970s and 80s.⁴

In the 1980s, feeding off new radical histories and deepening political struggles, a new generation of popular and people's history initiatives and productions emerged in communities and on campuses. The prominent role of the Wits History Workshop in this has been recorded in detail, but there were also other less well known (and qualitatively different) initiatives, including at the University of the Western Cape, where I started working in July 1985.⁵

UWC was in the process of self-consciously shedding its 'bush college' status and seeking to become the 'home of the intellectual left' in South Africa. After giving my first three classes, states of emergency and boycotts put an end to regular classes for over a year and the head of the History Department was chased off campus by students. In this volatile climate, academics were challenged to go beyond traditional academic and teaching approaches: they started informal classes and reading

groups, explored new curriculum ideas and approaches and initiated a Peoples History Project (PHP), linked up to the Peoples History and Peoples Education campaigns of the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) and other community groups.⁶ The idea of a 'holocaust museum for apartheid', which would document the history of apartheid and the struggle and (at a time of extreme censorship) create space for radical intellectual programmes, was also raised within this context in 1987, leading to the establishment of the Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa a few years later, in 1991.

The difference between the UWC tradition I was engaged in here in the 1980s and the general History Workshop position, for example, was that the academics involved saw themselves as activist intellectuals, self-consciously linked to the broad project of the national liberation movement. As Maloka has argued, the 'legal Marxists' and social historians at the helm of revisionist history had an ambiguous relationship with the liberation struggle and its 'national democratic' form. He contends that to create a 'separate image and identity for themselves vis-a-vis liberals on the one hand and the liberation movement on the other, the academic "radicals" ran amok with "class", reifying it as an analytical category at the expense of "race" '. The political sympathies of these scholars have been described as 'workerist', biased towards trade unions and non-communist socialist groupings.⁷

Phase 1 of my journey in public history, then, was part of the open identification by academics, within the formal institutional academic context at UWC, with the intensifying underground and mass struggles of the broad democratic movement, headed by the ANC. Rector Jakes Gerwel and others specifically argued that this identification was part of the promotion of a critical academic praxis in a particular historical context, not an escape from critical scholarship.⁸

This was followed by phase 2 of my UWC public history experience after the unbannings in 1990. It involved establishing the Mayibuye Centre and being part of the countrywide mobilisation and preparations for the future in the historical and cultural arenas in the run up to 1994.

After four years of preparation by the writer (including a two-year sabbatical in Britain in 1988/89 and a full time secondment in 1991), the Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa was formally established in 1992. In a short time the Centre built up a unique multi-media archive on apartheid and the liberation struggle with extensive collections of 60 000 photographs, several thousand hours of audio-visual productions and raw footage, 2 000 oral history tapes and over 100 historical papers collections from individuals and organizations, as well as an art collection, later supplemented by the International Artists Against Apartheid exhibition, put up in the new Parliament to replace the old apartheid iconography.⁹ The core of these collections came from the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF), which was the information nerve center of the

international anti-apartheid movement during the apartheid years. When IDAF closed in 1991, its material was donated to UWC on the recommendation of the ANC.¹⁰

Driven by a strong transformation vision, the Mayibuye Centre also initiated a range of exhibitions, public events, workshops, conferences and publications. The Mayibuye History and Literature Series of publications eventually ran to 94 titles, making it one of the largest campus-based publishing ventures in South Africa. The Esiqithini Exhibition with the South African Museum in 1992 was described as one of the most important cultural exhibitions yet by Steven Watson¹¹, and in 1994 there were no less than 14 Mayibuye Centre exhibitions traveling to 21 South African cities and towns, as well as abroad.¹²

The exhibitions and workshops were part of an active process of analysing, debating and contesting historical representations in the public sphere (including monuments, museums, tourism, culture and the media) at a time of momentous flux and change. The frenetic activity, productivity and focus accompanying these activities soon established the Centre as a pioneering new wave historical and cultural project with a national profile.¹³ It played a significant interventionist role in the historical and cultural sectors, and became a trend-setting heritage project, together with a handful of initiatives like the District Six Museum.

In 1994 I was appointed as full time Professor and Director of the Mayibuye Centre, thereby institutionalizing the role of public history on campus. The rest of the small team comprised of returning exiles, who had worked at IDAF - Gordon Metz, Barry Feinberg and Norman Kaplan – and black postgraduates, including Bertie Fritz, Khwezi Mpumlwana, Rachidi Molapo, Peter Williams, Suleiman and Shanaaz Issacs, Tholakele Nzuzu, Thembele Ndabeni and Anthea Josias, as well as community-based artists and photographers like Hamilton Budaza and Graham Goddard. Most of them were anti-apartheid political activists, with a high level of commitment and vision, and the Centre was able to draw on a dynamic network of community groups for support and input.

Given UWC's stance in the 1980s under Gerwel it was well located to participate in formal ways in the unfolding national transition process. Senior liberation movement figures, including Wolpe, Sachs, Asmal, Mabandla, Omar and Skweyiya, for example, were based there. UWC provided various think tanks for the government-in-waiting, including the constitutional committee housed in the Centre for Development Studies and the Mayibuye Centre in the heritage and cultural spheres. As part of the ANC Museums and Monuments Commission, the Director and Gordon Metz became part of the core debate around the future museums framework in South Africa.¹⁴

Phase three of the public history journey started after April 1994. A host of UWC-based intellectuals went into government or occupied various support roles. Once again, the Mayibuye Centre was fully

involved, helping the new democratic government in purposeful efforts to reshape the formal heritage sector.

For example, the Director participated in the preparatory conferences for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and certain submissions to it¹⁵; was appointed by the Minister of the new Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) onto the Arts and Culture Task Group to advise on future policy¹⁶; became a member of two committees writing the new Archives and Heritage legislation; and, together with Metz, acted from time to time as adviser to DACST, Ministers and the President's office, where the Future of Robben Island Committee under Ahmed Kathrada was located.¹⁷ Metz, also involved in various other arts and culture projects, went on to work for DACST, before starting the private-sector Heritage Agency.¹⁸ In late 1996, the Director became Interim Administrator (and later Director) of the new Robben Island Museum.

All the while, the Mayibuye Centre continued with its active programme of publications, exhibitions, public events and conferences, including the conference on *'The future of the past: The production of history in a changing South Africa'* in 1996, organized together with the History Department and the Institute for Historical Research (IHR) at UWC.¹⁹

Details of these 1990s public history processes and the activities of the Mayibuye Centre can be found in the Annual Reports of the Mayibuye Centre, 1991-1997, and the various articles and papers I wrote at the time.²⁰

The Future of the Past conference brought to the fore two other distinct threads of public history at UWC, which deserve to be noted together with the above, and which combined have, made UWC a nursery for the new public history school or tradition.

In the UWC History Department, a group of scholars, including Ciraj Rassool, Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley, Premesh Lalu, Patricia Hayes, Niki Rousseau, Wayne Dirk and Brent Simons, began to explore issues of representation and knowledge production raised by post-modern and other discourses. They were 'centrally concerned with how the past is visualized in the production of different kinds of histories'. The South African and Contemporary History Seminar at UWC, started in 1993, has provided a base for their discussions. These scholars also worked closely with other academics in cultural studies at UWC and UCT, became involved with programmes of the District Six and South African Museums, in particular, and started producing written papers which have become a canon on their own by now.²¹

Since the late 1990s, Witz, Rassool and some of the other historians have gained institutional bases for their work via projects on public and visual history funded by the National Research Foundation, the post-graduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies, run jointly by UWC, UCT and Robben Island Museum, and an exchange programme

with Emory University. (X) Rassool also serves on the councils of the District Six Museum and the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), and has published with colleagues two recent heritage-related books.²² The work of the UWC-based Marxist academic pioneer, Prof Martin Legassick, sometimes overlaps with these History Department-based projects.²³

The third strand of public history at UWC has been located at the Institute for Historical Research, revolving around the work of the Director, Prof H.C. 'Jatti' Bredekamp, and colleagues like Chris Loff, Ernest Messina, Russell Viljoen, Ricky Goedemans, Michael Bestin, Genadendal-based Dr Isaac Balie and his namesake Connel. After completing his part-time studies and being appointed as a researcher at 'Bush' in its apartheid heyday in the mid-1970s, Bredekamp was excluded from the white staff facilities in the Library which housed the IHR. But, today, he has become the single most influential mediator and academic figure in post-democracy debates around the history, identities, socio-economic development and 'first nation' status of the Khoisan people. Besides his research and writing, he has been involved in and driven various academic and public projects relating to the Khoisan, including being convenor of the National Consultative Conference of the Khoisan people in 2001, advising the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology and participating in petitions to the United Nations in Geneva and Gaborone.²⁴ Bredekamp was one of the party which recently accompanied Deputy Minister Bridget Mabandla to France to collect the remains of Sarah Baartman. The well-publicised journey back from the *Musee de la Homme* to South Africa was not only an international landmark in the debate about the repatriation of cultural patrimony and eloquent testimony about the growing significance of heritage in contemporary South Africa, but a crowning career highlight for this UWC historian. His recent efforts have now propelled him into the next stage of his work in the heritage and public history fields. On 1 November 2002, he was appointed CEO of Iziko Museums of Cape Town, the former South African Museum, which is the oldest museum in the southern hemisphere.²⁵

When the history of 'history' in South Africa over the past two decades is written the developments outlined above and the contributions of the three intersecting, but often dissonant UWC strands of public history will hopefully be given the place they deserve.

To conclude this section, I will overview the main developments in the heritage sector since the mid-1990s. In recent years, several new heritage laws have been passed and various new institutions and projects have been started. These will completely reshape the future directions of heritage in South Africa.

After a honeymoon period of visioning, planning and settling into power after 1994, the state started delivering, and emphasizing the need for delivery. The first official heritage institution of the new democracy

was the Robben Island Museum (RIM), which opened to the public on 1 January 1997, after a decision by Cabinet in September 1996.

The Cabinet mandate was that 'Robben Island must be developed into a World Heritage Site, National Monument and National Museum which can become a cultural and conservation showcase for the new South African democracy, while at the same time maximizing the economic, tourism and educational potential of the Island, and so encouraging its multi-purpose usage'.²⁶

Started in record time, this work-in-progress project has transformed into a major new heritage institution in the past five and a half years, with 150 staff and a wide range of historical and educational projects. It has also become one of the country's premier tourist destinations, with over one million visitors so far.²⁷

An analysis and full description of the nature of the RIM will be done elsewhere, but it is important to note that the pioneering Mayibuye Centre at UWC was disbanded in April 1998 and its collections incorporated into RIM. Under a co-operation agreement between RIM and UWC these UWC Mayibuye Archives are managed by RIM, but housed at UWC.²⁸ RIM, UWC and UCT have also combined to offer a post-graduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies.²⁹ In December 2001, the then RIM Director was made an Honorary Professor in History and Heritage Studies at UWC. In this way, early UWC public history initiatives, ideas and linkages have been expanded and consolidated and given a bigger institutional base.

The opening of RIM in 1997 was followed by several other new official heritage institutions initiated by national government. These include the 'Legacy' projects of Ncome Museum (1999), the Nelson Mandela National Museum (2001) and Freedom Park (2002), as well as the new Women's Monument at the Union Building and the Samora Machel Monument in Mpumalanga; the restructured Iziko Museums of Cape Town and the Northern Flagship Museum, which consolidated a number of old apartheid national museums into a new framework; the transformation of the old National Monuments Council into the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA); and the new UNESCO World Heritage Sites of the Cradle of Humankind, St Lucia and Drakensberg/Kahlamba.

Provincial governments are investing in heritage as well. The most impressive contribution has come from Gauteng where heritage priorities have been built into broader spatial development and economic planning processes under the 'Blue IQ' plan. The Gauteng government will make major investments in heritage, including R150 million for the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, R357 million for the Constitution Hill expansion including museums and R300 million for the revitalization of the Newtown Cultural Precinct.³⁰

Other nationally important historical projects taking root outside of the universities have been the private sector-sponsored and government-

supported South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) project to research and write a comprehensive history of the liberation struggle, the ongoing development of the ANC archives project at Fort Hare, the Department of Education's National History Commission and South African History Project, the Apartheid Museum at Gold Reef City and the Hector Peterson Museum opened on 16 June this year.³¹

At grassroots level there is an explosion of heritage and historically-based cultural tourism initiatives, ranging from the redevelopment of the Rivonia estate and the Mandela house in Orlando to the Egazini project in Grahamstown, the multi-purpose community-center memorial to the Cradock 4 and the Lwandle Migrant Workers Museum.

While RIM can be seen as the heritage legacy left by the Mandela presidency, Freedom Park will be the legacy of the Mbeki administration. After the emphasis on reconciliation and the colossal task of simply establishing a functioning democratic system in the first presidency, the value of history and heritage seems to be growing in the Mbeki era as the societal transformation process deepens and the idea of African renaissance gains currency. Freedom Park, the recent attempts by Education Minister Asmal to promote history in schools, the importance attached by government to the return of Sarah Baartman's remains and the big investments into the emerging heritage sector give some indication of this.

More than one billion rand has already been invested in heritage if one looks at the figures for RIM (roughly R200m), Freedom Park (R350m), the Gauteng 'Blue IQ' projects (R750m) and the Apartheid Museum (R90m) alone. This will have a massive impact down the line and important implications for historians and heritage workers.

A feature of the new heritage sector is the emergence of a black leadership and a new corps of heritage workers, reflecting the redress and equity priorities of the new democracy. Whereas the leadership of the museums and heritage sector was almost exclusively white in 1990, with just a handful of black managers, today it is primarily black. Recent new appointments include Pumla Madiba (CEO of the South African Heritage Resources Agency), Mongane Wally Serote and Lindiwe Gadd (Freedom Park), Khwezi Mpumlwana (Nelson Mandela National Museum), Ben Martins and Paul Langa, (acting CEOs of Robben Island Museum), Jatti Bredekamp (Iziko Museums of Cape Town) and Ali Hlongwane (Hector Peterson Museum.) Rooksana Omar is president of the South African Museums Association and young museologists like Wendy Yapi (South African Mission Museum) and Vuyisani Mgiijima (Worcester) are now in charge of smaller museums. The changing profiles in the heritage sector are also demonstrated by the RIM statistics. Out of 150 staff, 132 are black, including 8 out of 9 managers, of which 5 are women.

So, almost as if by stealth, while complaints about the decline of history abound, a whole new billion rand heritage infrastructure is being

put in place which will fundamentally reshape the heritage and public history environment in future, and create major opportunities for historians, educators and heritage practitioners.

2. ACADEMIC HISTORIANS AND NEW APPROACHES TO HERITAGE

Changing the tone of the debate

While there has been a significant expansion of public history or heritage in the past decade, academic history, on the contrary, has been contracting and feeling under pressure.

Early in 1990, the *Radical History Review* produced a special edition on 'History in South Africa'. Belinda Bozzoli confidently claimed that 'Over the past fifteen years radical historians have rewritten the history of South Africa' ³²

The revisionists, generally white, English speaking) scholars, had become the undisputed leaders of the South African historical profession following the collapse of the political and historical projects of Afrikaner nationalism. History as a discipline was at the height of popularity.

However, as is well understood by now, at the very time that the revisionist historians were reaching the apex of their influence, seismic political changes on the national and international fronts, and the hurtling technological revolution accompanying economic globalisation, were dramatically reshaping the terrain in which they were operating.

Within five years, at the 1995 South African Historical Association Conference in Grahamstown, Paul Maylam devoted his presidential address to the fact that despite 20 years of unparalleled growth and productivity the academic history profession was riddled with 'tensions, self-doubt, and a sense of crisis.' ³³

Today, it is said, the profession is at a low point. In their article, '*Probing the predicaments of academic historians in South Africa*' (2000), Tim Nuttall and John Wright describe 'feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, frustration, defensiveness, a sense that the existing order is unraveling....' ³⁴

In '*New nation, new history? Constructing the past in South Africa*', a paper written since my June address, Colin Bundy, quoting various other authorities, confirms: 'The last decade has been disquieting – even demoralizing – for South African historians. The confidence of 1992 now looks like hubris'.³⁵

The crisis is reflected in shrinking resources and appointments, drops of up to 50% in student numbers since 1996 at some universities, and the disappearance of history as a separate school subject.

The Unisa History Department has shrunk from over 30 staff in the 1980s to 17, with another 5 expected to be cut. UWC undergraduate numbers have declined from over 3 000 in the 1980s to hundreds. Nearby Stellenbosch, too, has only 5 lecturers and low student numbers.³⁶

There has been a sharp decrease in the publication of academic histories. Of 25 non-fiction books short-listed for the 2002 Alan Paton Prize, only three were by South African academic historians, namely Jane Carruthers, Jeff Guy and Robert Morrell.³⁷

Nuttall and Wright explain that the South African predicament is further exacerbated by changing international economic and intellectual shifts and, indeed, with ‘the dissolution of the world in which academic history as we know it emerged and grew up’.³⁸

Increasingly, they say, history is becoming a marginalized subject at university, acting as a ‘service discipline’ to other academic fields and going in multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary ways. The recent government announcements on the restructuring of the South Africa’s tertiary institutions will have done little to allay these concerns.

Both Maylam and Nuttall/Wright conclude that the market for professional history is shrinking, and that it is even becoming subsumed into public history and heritage.

How, then, does ‘history’ go forward, and relate to the new public history/heritage approaches and the new environments it finds itself in? What prevents some academic historians from engaging with these new terrains? What challenges does this engagement present? How can heritage help to revitalize academic history?

My first comment is: the tone of the debate needs to change. Academic historians are more or less fixed into a self-perpetuating ‘danger’, ‘threat’, ‘superficial’, ‘history swallowed up by Hollywood’ mode of thinking. Though heritage in its widest forms certainly lends itself to historically problematic practices, it is frustrating as a historian and heritage practitioner to hear this refrain constantly when a professional and critical approach has been at the heart of the Mayibuye Centre and Robben Island Museum projects all along. The debate needs nuance. And, I want to focus now on the critical dimensions of heritage and the opportunities that exist for historians.

Heritage can enhance rather than compromise critical approaches

The biggest concern academics have is probably that heritage compromises long established notions of academic objectivity and distance.³⁹ The first point I want to make is that it can, in fact, enhance critical academic approaches.

To start with, I will go into some detail about what constitutes good history in order to create some measuring point. The references are Nuttall and Wright’s thoughtful article and the findings of the History

and Archaeology committee, appointed by Minister Kader Asmal in 2000 to report on the state of history in South African schools, as part of his Department's 'Values in Education Initiative'.⁴⁰

The Report of the History/Archaeology Panel to the Minister of Education (2000) defines the nature, value and values of history very well and there is nothing, one feels, that does not apply also to heritage/public history in these definitions. As one of the contributors to the report,⁴¹ I take the liberty to draw directly and in depth from it, even if the contents are already familiar territory for professional historians.

The Nature of History:

History shares with literature, art, history of art, and other laboratories of the spirit and mind, a preoccupation with exploring the many wonders and contradictions of the human condition ... history turns on the movement of time and space, which provides us with a sense of unfolding process, teaches us about the workings of cause and effect and, quite simply, enlightens us about the past. While history may naturally be written in this way or that way, the essential concerns of good history focus upon:

- a representation of the past through clear narrative, explanation and analysis;
- a careful and systematic study of important processes such as power or economic interest over time, with a strong emphasis on change and continuity, and on how and why change occurs in human societies;
- a critical evaluation of sources and evidence on the past;
- a recognition of the importance of cultivating empathy with varying experiences of the past;
- a fostering of vibrant and healthy critical debate between differing perspectives;
- interpretations and representations of the past;
- a recognition of the study of the past as a continuing process with definite implications for the future, requiring exploration of, and debate over how, the historical past relates to the present and the future.⁴²

The Values and Value of Historical Learning:

Study of the past can serve a range of important and enriching social, political, cultural and environmental functions. Accordingly:

The study of how to analyse sources and evidence, and the study of differing interpretations and divergent opinion and voices, is a central means of imparting the ability to think in a rigorous manner and to think critically about society. The

probing examination of self-congratulatory conventional wisdoms encourages wider critical thinking and creates an informed citizenry which is able to demand respect from those in power.

Instead of defining 'values education' or 'peace education' as the communication of a prescriptive set of worthy homilies about what is good or bad or positive and negative, history contextualizes these weighty issues and assists constructive debate over them in an informed manner, through the discipline of carefully weighing and evaluating evidence and reading a range of viewpoints.

Fosters the invaluable mental powers of discriminating judgement.

Is important in the construction of identity.

Enables us to listen to formerly subjugated voices and to redress the invisibility of the formerly marginalized.

Encourages us to examine in concrete terms, through rich examples of narratives of real-life situations, the challenging nature of 'truth'.

Helps us understand the context between ideas of relativism and the idea of truth is necessary to the educational maturation of every human being.

Provides a critically important perspective on the pathways to economic development and economic growth.

Is a vital ingredient in promoting democratic values.

Is a significant instrument for desegregating society.

Is deliberately about the crucial role of memory in society, [especially important in] a country like South Africa, which has a fractured national memory.

Is a sound vocational preparation for a wide range of jobs and careers.⁴³

The same fundamentals

The above dimensions of, and approaches to, history are wholly applicable to good heritage practice – and underpin, also, my understanding of how to approach heritage.

What of the more tightly defined definition of academic history given by Nuttall and Wright:

We understand it as having to do with the research and writing of narratives and explanations of past events by professional historians at universities, with the presentation of the results of research in academic forums and publications, and with the delivery of suitably structured versions of it to students through taught courses. Its producers normally aim to base their findings on in-

*depth empirical research, and normally claim to be committed to open debate as a means of pursuing knowledge. In one way or another, sometimes implicitly in its textual form, sometimes explicitly through stated claims, academic history presents itself as being 'true', or at least authoritative, within a framework of rationalist discourse.*⁴⁴

I can live with this definition too, with some qualification, which I will tabulate in a yes/no way.

Having to do with 'research, writings, narratives and explanations of the past'. Yes, although I would prefer the word 'productions' to 'writings' here.

'By professional historians at universities'. No, what about those with or without history Ph.D's outside who produce history. And, what about broader forums and media?

'Delivery of suitably structured versions of the past' to students. Yes, that is what heritage does too (except structured delivery in heritage is called 'packaged history'). However, add 'and other audiences' to 'students'. Again, why restrict the terrain and audience for 'history' - the classroom today assumes many shapes.

'Research'. Yes, most definitely.

'Open debate'. Yes. It is a key focus in heritage institutions like District Six Museum, even if not generally applied in the industry.

'True or at least authoritative': Ja/nee. Perhaps 'authoritative', but no one believes in Ranke anymore.

Critical heritage practice rests on the same fundamentals as history. Academic historians are increasingly realizing this and, indeed, testifying to how heritage can sharpen traditional academic skills and approaches.

Sharpening academic skills

Various innovative academic historians have started attesting to the different ways in which their involvement with 'heritage' projects has helped sharpen their academic skills.

In her paper at the SAHA conference at RAU in June 2002, *'Heritage vs history: the end of a noble tradition?'*, Cynthia Kros demonstrated different ways in which this has happened for her. Questions she posed in undertaking certain heritage tasks – how to explain succinctly complex, shifting patterns of identities and choices, 'in fourteen minutes or two text panels, as my sceptical colleagues kept on reminding me' – helped her in turn to ask more searching questions of her own confident academic and theoretical explanations,⁴⁵ which she found wanting in certain aspects.

Bob Edgar's close associations with the Bulhoek community during post-doctoral research sharpened his anthropological insights and led to new research interests, including the area of psychology.⁴⁶

Julia Wells, one of the established South African historians most committed to working in off-campus heritage projects in recent years, through her involvement in the eGazini and other projects in Grahamstown, has found that she has been able to access sources and information which 'exists far-beyond the written record'. Heritage has helped her to better 'define' relevance and identify new areas of enquiry and work.⁴⁷

Leslie Witz and his UWC colleagues also give various examples of how museums can stimulate dynamic methodologies and insights.⁴⁸ Experiential observations on battle sites, for example, framed 'the way we saw history' and highlighted the limitations of an engagement with purely literary sources and texts.⁴⁹

These insights, which are in many respects sensible and self-evident, are now gaining increasing academic acceptance.

Complexity and contradiction not forfeited.

Witz et al point out in an important article, '*Who speaks for "South African" pasts?*' (1999), that:

*'Heritage might often be in the domain of nation-building and may seem to 'thrive' on historical error, but to regard these as the salient characteristic of heritage is not to comprehend the complexities of a varied and disputatious field. It is precisely because of the possibilities of contestation in the public domain that academics need to engage with this field. But it is not as experts in the study and presentation of the past that they should make this engagement. Public inscriptions of and upon the landscape of the South African past are actually means of producing history.'*⁵⁰

Beyond dealing with the facts, academics are challenged to engage with the 'representational and symbolic'. New methodologies, standards and analytical skills are required of them.

Heritage and public history should be a serious intellectual project which deepens the critical content of (rather than dumbs down) history. It is, therefore, necessary to counter the stereotypical way these approaches get simplified.

Even as the Mayibuye Centre organized a wide range of history/public history conferences, exhibitions, projects and publications on campus in the early 1990s, in way that was hugely productive by any standards, there were those academic critics who dismissed them as political sideshows. The Mayibuye Centre was challenging traditional hierarchies and forms and, therefore, this was not 'academic'.

Later, operating off campus, in the museum and tourism arena, the (often uncritical) indignation was even worse. For example, when a private sector-sponsored Mandela/Cosby dinner was held on Robben

Island at the request of ex-political prisoners to raise funds for funerals and those excluded from work and opportunity, it was a closed and shut case for a confident Kogila Moodley and Heribert Adam: 'In associating itself indiscriminately with the controllers of wealth, the ANC diminished its own moral standing' and 'undermined the ownership of the island by all South Africa's people'. Moreover:

No Jewish organisation would ever consider holding an exclusive gala dinner at Auschwitz in support of Yad Vashem ... Even Americans pay respect to the slave house at Goree Island ... Yet Cosby clowns in Mandela's tiny prison cell... .

Most people fall silent when they enter a nation's cemetery. Words fail to articulate the unspeakable. Tears are held back. You swallow hard to contain your emotions. More sensitive visitors weep openly. Hilary Clinton together with South Africa's elite laughs on Robben Island. The celebrating gala party sings "Happy Birthday" for Cosby's wife into the silent night.

It still remains to be explained why the island's political prisoners return so frequently. Why do Mandela, Kathrada and Sexwale joke at their place of degradation? Survivors of Auschwitz would reassemble for a memorial service but hardly enjoy visiting their place of suffering and trivialize it as a photo opportunity for the international media.

Do the former prisoners exhibit the Stockholm syndrome, the subconscious identification with the powerful oppressor. After all Mandela built his Transkei home according to the exact design of his last prison cottage.⁵¹

It was easy for these well-travelled Canadian academics to stereotype an event and, by extension, the heritage institution which provided the venue and facilities – and know nothing of them. Complexity and ambiguity is forfeited in the name of academic analysis. Did they consider that there could have been clowning and seriousness, that ex-prisoners might have the right to be demonstrably happy returning to their place of incarceration, even as they confronted the dark side of the experience in quieter moments, and that this might actually be appropriate on Robben Island, which is a symbol of triumph and overcoming for them. Perhaps this is also why ex-prisoners 'return so frequently' to the island. (The posers about 'Stockholm syndrome' and Mandela's house design I will leave to psychoanalysts and others better qualified).

Could singing happy birthday to someone who had had a bereavement not actually be an affirmation of healing and comradeship and what Robben Island stood for? An African, as opposed to European Calvinist-rooted, way of commemoration? (Mandela did after all invent refreshingly down-to-earth diplomatic protocols all of his own as president). A recent study comparing South African and Czechoslovakian political experiences has, incidentally, found vastly differing responses; a

general collective strength and optimism in one case and a profound sense of individualized pain and alienation in the other.⁵²

Did the writers know anything of the thinking and disagreements and considerations about impacts, commercialisation, contradiction, representation, restraints and future policy that went on internally in the museum?

Could they not have examined more closely the easy comparisons with Auschwitz. Jacob Zuma was the ballroom dancing champion on Robben Island. Did the inmates at Auschwitz have one too?

Even refined observers like Tim Nuttall and John Wright, oft quoted here, have based their experiential observations on heritage on one visit to the island and one speech on Ncome by a Minister, Lionel Mtshali, not known for his cutting-edge ideas on 21st century heritage directions.⁵³ While the (not sophisticated and not commonly-shared) comments of a tour guide are certainly an indication of an approach, and reason for self-examination, they should (like a poor undergraduate essay] not be used as the sole evidence to judge a complex and multi-layered organization with multiple discussion, research, educational and engagement levels.

One cannot understand Robben Island Museum (and other serious heritage projects) as anything else, but a large and complex intellectual and educational project operating on multiple levels.

One of the four 'core essences' in the vision statement of RIM, besides the protection of Robben Island's legacy and the proper conservation of the museum and the island's cultural and natural resources, is 'Promoting RIM as a platform for critical debate and lifelong learning'.⁵⁴ As the still-young museum matures as an organization its intellectual content and capacity as a historical and educational institution will grow still further.

Although results are still uneven, RIM's approach has been to explore complexity and contradiction, avoid easy master narratives, attempt to develop critical understandings and, generally, pursue professional best practice ways.

I can only give some brief examples here: the austere approaches and considerations of 'voice' by the exhibitions unit under Roger Meintjies in developing the 'Cell Stories', 'Hidden Cameras' and Nelson Mandela Gateway exhibitions⁵⁵; the dynamic educational methodologies being developed in multi-media and multi-lingual museum productions and programmes, like the carefully conceptualized Robben Island roadshow, currently traveling through the rural Eastern Cape using drama as a tool⁵⁶; 3 000 hours of film of ex-prisoner reference groups coming back and talking about particular spaces on the island; the oral history approaches dealing sensitively with a range of issues, including ethics and intellectual property when working with unemployed/rich/poor/rural/famous/illiterate/women interviewees;⁵⁷ the Robben Island Heritage Training Programme, run in conjunction with

UWC and UCT, which has already resulted in well over one hundred post-graduate diplomas; building from scratch a multi-media archive with 350 collections of historical documents; and computerised systems and databases, which will take beating in South Africa.

Add to this workshops, conferences and exactly 100 books since 1991. Is this not about history and critical intellectual practices?

It has been disempowering to be stereotyped constantly in cardboard ways by supposedly 'critical' observers and written off together with an entire sector as 'history swallowed up by Hollywood'.

We as heritage practitioners might be tempted to ask, on which side is the dumbed-down interpretation and narrative?

Adapting to change necessary

Historians and other heritage workers are living in a totally different world today from only a few years ago and once again new responses (beyond the political ones referred to elsewhere in the paper) are called for.

We are experiencing rapid changes in society, the economy, the media and in ways of communicating. The accelerating move towards the information society over the past decade has changed forever how people will produce knowledge and present and represent the past. The advent of internet and E-mail, for example, has clearly had major implications for the future of history, and with these changes we develop new practices, perceptions and mindsets. Ideas, like post-modernism, that have accompanied this e-revolution similarly need to be responded to.⁵⁸ Academic historians must stay in touch.

Robben Island Museum and the former Mayibuye Centre again serve as examples. Applying critical skills while collecting, conserving and working with multi-media archives, and interacting with a wide array of audiences, crossing disciplines, and using media like art, film, CD-ROM and book publishing as part of everyday experience, is perhaps still somewhat unconventional but for me it has become the lifeblood of critical practice. Working daily with fellow staff who aren't historians, but photographers, poets, book editors, sculptors, designers, artists, librarians, educators, tour guides and archivists, opened new ways of 'seeing', new ways of working.

Bundy, quoting Cobley, acknowledges the potential here, confirming that there have been excellent curriculum innovations recently in the new inter-disciplinary and 'service' courses, for example in history and film.⁵⁹

Jobs, survival and new possibilities

Heritage has opened up a whole range of multi-disciplinary possibilities and opportunities for academics and professionals.

For example, archaeologists like Tobias, Thackeray and Estherhuizen are participating in public processes, such as the 'Cradle of Humankind' World Heritage Site project, and also getting generous public recognition for their role in revealing the long history and sophistication of early Africans, thereby underpinning the current national project of restoring the pride and integrity of Africans in a national and global context.⁶⁰

Julia Wells, working in the rural Eastern Cape, has given examples of the 'scope and range of possibilities:

*The Province of the Eastern Cape commissioned an exhibition on the role of traditional leaders in the province. The local tourism board in Grahamstown wants to develop the old Fingo Village township into a showpiece of black urban history. A group of black women engaged in development programmes wants to produce a booklet on the 'unsung heroines of the local struggle'; coastal townships want to know what tours to put into their local township for the Christmas crowd. The amaNdlambe Traditional Authority wants to build a cultural village which honours their feisty ancestor who fought in 5 of the 9 frontier wars. The new Makana Municipality (which includes Grahamstown and surrounding areas) wants to build an annual festival ... How do all these histories get put together into 'products' which the public can appreciate and embrace? These are the kind of issues which surround us. From this brief list, consider the range of clients: provincial government, tourism industry, traditional authorities, municipal government, and development-oriented community groups.*⁶¹

Wells correctly points out that the history which gets presented in the public sphere will be as good or as bad as professional historians allow it to be. She concludes,

*'We live in an environment where customers or clients are increasingly coming forward, with their own needs and interests. For many historians, the notion of being client-oriented is novel and perhaps threatening. I would like to suggest it should rather be seen as exciting and invigorating'.*⁶²

In a billion rand, growing industry, there will be increasing opportunities for academic historians, not least of which are the formation of strategic alliances, which can affirm the value of history in the post-democracy environments.

The outcomes can be unexpectedly positive. In his work with the 'Israelites' near Queenstown, where he helped trace the lost 'Ark of the Covenant', Bob Edgar not only contributed meaningfully to the host community and was himself richly rewarded academically, the believers now see him as being imbued with the powers of an angel.⁶³

Re-examining old assumptions and approaches

To be able to respond positively to the challenges presented above, academic historians should be encouraged to examine self-critically long established academic methodological approaches and positions.

The experiences at the University of the Western Cape and Robben Island Museum have taught me that history can no longer be contained within narrow traditional frameworks. And also that it is about time that the profession recognised the intellectual achievements that have occurred in this broader historical field.

Even a cursory overview of the achievements at the two institutions which I have been associated with in the past decade surely show that heritage and public history are at the core sophisticated historical and intellectual projects.

Instead of making distinctions between history and heritage, Witz et al challenge historians 'to start considering the different ways that pastness is framed and claimed as history in its own right'.

History is being reconceptualised in creative ways and is speaking in new languages as we stride into the 21st century. Academics need to keep up, without forfeiting a critical role. Indeed, they would do well to heed the call by the literary critic, Benita Parry, for those dealing with memory to '[join] remembrance of the past with a critique of the contemporary condition ... remaining unreconciled to the past and discontented with the present'.⁶⁴

To be active beyond the ivory tower does not necessarily mean compromising academic integrity and critical approaches. On the contrary, it is essential to any radical or critical intellectual project.

As the writer emphasized in a 1996 paper, 'The time has come to restructure the historical profession in a way that gives greater recognition to the 'diversity of historical practice' and greater recognition and reward for 'different channels of historical transmission'.⁶⁵ This means creating new leaderships, challenging the closed shops of established academic institutions, encouraging new approaches and new projects and positions, and recognizing that history is inescapably part of the broader political and socio-economic processes of our time.

3. FACING UP TO OUR OWN PASTS: RACE, 'REWRITING' AND POWER

In addition to the imperative that academic historians become methodologically more flexible and stretch old disciplinary boundaries, inter alia by engaging with the emerging heritage sector, I believe there are other important issues relating to the politics of production and the changing political context that the profession needs to address in order to move out of the 'doom and gloom' scenario of the 1990s.

The first is to recognize and address its still overwhelmingly white racially-based composition and, therefore, the inextricable linkages to old power structures, regardless of intent, output and professionalism.

The second is the consequent necessity to look at the politics of production in academic history, and to examine and challenge some comfortable assumptions around nationalism and nation-building.

Racially-exclusive foundations of 'history'

Maloka (*Writing for them: "Radical" historiography in South Africa and the "radical" other*) and Odendaal (*Dealing with the past/making deals with the past: Public history in South Africa in the 1990s*) pointed out forcefully in papers in 1996 that academic historians have to confront the fact that the profession is still overwhelmingly white dominated and that until the demographics of knowledge production at universities are corrected this will remain an inescapably anachronistic fact in the new democracy.⁶⁶

Six years later, it seems there has been little change. Senior historians accept that there are not enough black people in the history departments at universities:

*The number of academic historians in tenured posts is either static or declining, and there is little change in the longstanding demographic dominance of white men in these jobs ... By and large, the South African academy has failed to attract, or keep within its fold, significant numbers of young black historians.*⁶⁷

The situation is lamented. History Department heads explain, we cannot get good people, we don't have the resources to change, the brightest products end up in civil service and the private sector.

Absent in these analyses are concrete plans by the profession to rectify the situation. External factors are identified as the problem. There appears to be no urgency or sustained or sustainable strategies from within, such as special bursary, fundraising, recruitment or career-planning proposals. In fact, it is sometimes implied, the historically excluded may themselves be to blame. For example, the tendency of black graduates to go into government service or the private sector

is to a certain extent understandable, but at the same time this inclination generates certain questions about the apparent polar opposites of the search for material prosperity and seriousness with the expansion of academic knowledge. Ideally there should be a type of balance, but this is clearly not the case'.⁶⁸

The summation is that 'there are not many signs of dynamic and fresh academic outputs by black historians'.⁶⁹

Both the demographic status quo and these types of argument are unsustainable. Political insistence and new equity legislation are increasing the pressure for redress in the workplace. The announcement by Minister Geraldine Fraser Moleketi in May 2002 that the civil service was now 85% black, and that major shifts had occurred at the top management levels and with regard to women, underlines this fact.⁷⁰ The problem in academic history – where it was believed there were still less than 10 black history Ph.D's in the mid-1990s,⁷¹ - will have to be addressed, not simply stated.

Black leadership is a prerequisite for the regeneration of academic history in South Africa, and is inevitable. The trends described above in heritage and the civil service will eventually blow through to the universities too.

Meanwhile, in the absence of black voices inside the history academy, there is a vigorous debate and a substantial body of intellectuals with historical training located outside of the universities, for example: Prof Ben Magubane and Dr Sifiso Ndlovu (SADET); Dr Eddie Maloka (Africa Institute), Dr Xolela Mangcu (Biko Foundation), Prof Wilmot James, Nhlanhla Ndebele and Moses Radiseni (HSRC), Dr June Bam (SA History Project), Dr Mongane Wally Serote (Freedom Park), Prof Jatti Bredekamp (Iziko Museums of Cape Town), Khwezi ka Mpumlwana (Nelson Mandela National Museum), Dr Ashwin Desai and Dr Russell Ally (NGOs), Saki Macozoma (private sector) and Randi Erentzen, Dr Manelisi Genge and Dr Pallo Jordan (government/politics).

Nation-building and democracy: Re-examining assumptions and the politics of production.

Until recently, the revisionist social historians could confidently proclaim that they were the new orthodoxy. Therefore, they were confident about change and the positions they articulated.

With regard to change, one of the tendencies was: Because [the dominant school] is “radical”, there is therefore nothing to change.⁷²

Criticisms of the ANC, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), rainbowism and other aspects of the post-democracy nation-building project happened without too much self examination.

In the mid 1990s, one scholar noted a surprising lack of interest in the profession about researching the history of the liberation struggle, given the momentous shifts in power that were occurring.⁷³ At the 1995

South African Historical Society conference in Grahamstown, barely a year after the transition to democracy, only 4 papers out of 100 reportedly dealt with the history of the liberation struggle; with a few exceptions the running was still being done by foreign scholars such as Tom Karis, Gail Gerhart, Allison Drew, Stephen Ellis and Vladimir Shubin.⁷⁴ These trends have persisted. They have their roots in the confident assertion that 'South African social historians had long since disaggregated nationalism and forcefully confronted nationalistic versions of the past'.⁷⁵

However, the transition to democracy and the demands *inter alia* for equity and redress have put these positions under pressure and have introduced discomfort, uncertainty and a certain defensiveness in the academy. The reconciliation politics of the Mandela period and the African Renaissance project of the Mbeki era have, seemingly, 'left the mostly white history academy stranded'.⁷⁶ In addition to problems such as a shrinking institutional base, 'insecurities were intensified by a fundamental uncertainty as to their audience, their script or their role in the drama of the post-apartheid 1990s'.⁷⁷ Academic historians, 'who are compelled to refer to archival sources where they continue to find more evidence for conflict than co-operation', are uncertain. And, they 'must now look forward without looking back too much'.⁷⁸

In a recent inaugural address, '*Herhistorisering en herposisionering: Perspektiewe van geskiedsbeoefening in hedendaagse Suid-Afrika*' (2001), the respected Albert Grundlingh positioned himself strongly against the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process, ANC pronouncements about history and government-supported initiatives like SADET. He holds little hope for SADET and criticizes the 're-writing history' pronouncements behind it, which 'at a stroke wipe from the table' thirty years of efforts of 'academic history writing which *inter alia* aimed to rescue black history from obscurity'.

*Although it is probably unreasonable to expect that the president of a country should be fully up-to-date with academic history – his task after all lies elsewhere – it can reasonably be expected that the project leader of the proposed new history, Prof Bernard Magubane, should have grounded historiographical knowledge. Magubane is an anthropologist/historian who lectured for fully thirty years as an exile in America. It does not appear as if academic balance [ewewigtigheid] was for him a high priority.*⁷⁹

Only bad history has come from the ANC. The TRC was poor history. The ANC's nationalist project is equated with negative outcomes. Ready comparisons are made with Afrikaner nationalism.⁸⁰

The transformation process at 'numerous' institutions which has resulted in 'an ongoing and uncontrolled powergame [magspel] with accompanying institutional collapse and little academic progression' is also bemoaned.⁸¹

Criticism and the plurality of views lie at the heart of the scholarly tradition - and the rights of freedom of expression are now guaranteed for the first time in the constitution - but increasingly there will be questions about the intellectual and moral authority and judgements of white historians if their views consistently undermine dominant paradigms in this way.

If the profession is still more-or-less lilywhite and middle-aged, and the country is moving rapidly in another direction, academic historians need to be increasingly self-conscious, problematising their own approaches, social origins, power locations and agendas more.⁸²

Academic historians, even the radical ones, generally had an ambiguous relationship with the pre-1994 national democratic struggles. Many were critical intellectually of nationalism. Others were uncomfortably on the edges. Most were not even supporters of the liberation movements.⁸³ The criticisms noted above cannot be separated from this fact.

Scepticism about nationalism is healthy, and often historically well founded. The situation in Zimbabwe is perhaps the latest example to illustrate this. My view, however, is that the baby must not be thrown out with the bathwater. Nationalism and nation-building in South Africa need more nuanced assessments. Democratisation and redress are at the core of the current nation-building project, and the South African liberation movement has always espoused a South African nationalism with remarkably inclusive goals.

Historians should take care not to simplify and underestimate the need for a history which reinserts black people into the heart of the national narrative. Making too ready comparisons with Afrikaner nationalism, for example, can equate into the claims regularly used by conservatives in newspaper columns that the ANC government is the same as the old National Party government .

The emphases and silences of the profession here need to be explored and contested as well. What lies behind the above-mentioned critiques? Far from a left universalist concern about the record of nationalism, could it not simply reflect an unstated conservative white political agenda and hostility to change? If the platform is a Groep van 63 meeting or an inaugural lecture at a predominantly white institution, with only a handful of those previously classified as 'non-whites' present, does this not in itself become a political statement? Location, platform and audience matter.

The views of the senior social historians above coincide with post-modern concerns to undermine master narratives of struggle and nation-building. The widely quoted book by Nuttall and Coetzee, *Negotiating the past: The making of memory in South Africa* (1998) is one example of this up-front challenge to new nation orthodoxies, the tendency of accounts of collective suffering to serve ethnic nationalist agendas and ways in which the 'freeing' of memory happens.⁸⁴

These new critical approaches are fresh and often extremely useful and illuminating. But, where does the authorial voice derive its authority from? Again, locations, academic power bases and underlying political agendas need to be critically examined. When UWC and UCT cultural studies scholars organised a conference to interrogate the truth commission in 1995, there was only one black person present out of more than one hundred participants. The guest speaker was the apartheid-spy, Mark Behr, who received a standing ovation for his confession in literary form. The conference, which was well supported by sponsors because of its importance, was seen by some as a gross appropriation of space.⁸⁵

In *Negotiating the Past* only 3 out of 16 chapters are by black scholars - Ndebele, Rassool and Makoni. In a follow up book by Nuttall and Michael, *Senses of culture: South African cultural studies* (2000), an attempt is made to bring in black agency through interviews, but the chapter ratio is one or two out of 25.⁸⁶

Given this fact and the context of South Africa's particular history, is this 'expert' critique of nation-building narratives and this academic self-confidence as fluent and powerful as it appears/claims to be? Could the post-modern retreat to relativity, and the withdrawal from social engagement and 'nation-building' not be another way in which privileged scholars guard occupied spaces and reproduce old power and intellectual networks in a new setting? Could a theoretically justified retreat to a position of beyond accountability not in fact be a way of avoiding questions about power and production, or abetting the perpetuation of past exclusions and cultures of negation? These are the difficult questions, which an examination and inversion of the position of those who continue to dictate the academic debates brings up.⁸⁷

Dealing with the history of the liberation struggle and committing to the nation-building project does not automatically mean imposing 'politically correct' history of a new rainbow nation or African Renaissance master narrative, or presume a 'transcendence of critique'. It does not have to involve romanticizing struggle, closing analysis or making this scholarship subservient to political agendas, as scholars sometimes assume. It is correct that scholars should explore the silences behind the master narratives, probe the contradictions in the struggle, point out the dangers of nationalist narratives etcetera. But this self-critical academic project needs to be responsive to the political and social context, giving content to democracy by helping to shape debates and nuanced understandings within the framework of national transformation and rebuilding.⁸⁸

If academic historians self-consciously set themselves apart from this project, they must not then be discomfited by challenges to their own racially-defined intellectual inheritance and academic bases and biases.

Finally, it should be appreciated that contemporary calls for rewriting also go beyond politics and nationalism to social aspects of exclusion which, as our experiences in heritage with its living, participative approach, have shown, are important. The restorative and healing power of telling stories and being acknowledged is huge; this applies in equal measure to 'leaders' and grassroots people, to individuals and communities.⁸⁹

Recognising the dispossession and exclusions that live on

Clearly South African history has not been definitively re-written, either in terms of analytical or paradigmatic finality, or the exhaustion of what is in any case an ongoing project.

The hugeness of black exclusion in the past, which becomes more evident as time passes, means that the 'invisibility' of black people in both the narratives of the past and the construction of these is still a fact?

At the launch of the Freedom Park project on 16 June 2002, President Thabo Mbeki dwelled on this theme of the 'invisible' African whose cultures, customs, beliefs and histories had been systematically destroyed over the centuries. Quoting Ben Okri, he said:

He was born invisible. His mother was invisible too, and that was why she could see him. His people lived contented lives, working on the farms, under the familiar sunlight. Their lives stretched back into the invisible centuries and all that had come down from those differently coloured ages were legends and rich traditions, unwritten and therefore remembered. They were remembered because they were lived...

It was in the books that he first learnt of his invisibility. He searched for himself and his people in all the history books he read and discovered to his youthful astonishment that he didn't exist.. This troubled him so much that he resolved, as soon as he was old enough, to leave his land and find the people who did exist, to see what they looked like...

He traveled the seas, saying little, and when anyone asked him why he journeyed and what his destination was, he always gave two answers. One answer was for the ear of the questioner. The second answer was for his own heart. The first answer went like this: 'I don't know why I am traveling. I don't know where I am going'. And the second answer went like this. 'I am traveling to know why I am invisible. My quest is for the secret of visibility'.

Those who worked with him in those years saw him as a simple man. Actually, they didn't see him at all.⁹⁰

No one who was at Freedom Park on 16 June needed reminding of the saliency of those words for South African history.

Those who politically turned around the course of South African history want to lead and participate in the process of making a past

where people are made visible again. This is perfectly logical in this particular historical circumstance. It does not mean only blacks can write black history, but as Grundlingh has observed in relation to one of our African languages, '... it is nevertheless so that a familiarity with Afrikaans and the nuances of the language can give the historian insight into the fine inter-relationship and accent shifts which would otherwise perhaps not come to the fore in the same way'.⁹¹

It should not be that difficult to acknowledge that those excluded in the past would add new dimensions and imaginations to the narratives that the more or less racially exclusive process of academic rewriting since the 1970s, no matter how 'authoritative' or well motivated, could ever have described or understood fully.

One example of the new dimensions that can go with the new history projects is perhaps the new South African coat of arms. It took a particular imagination to come up with the San motto, 'lke e: /xarra //ke' (diverse people unite), when the country already had 11 official languages. Considering formal European-dominated traditions of heraldry, the president himself suggested using 'our own Latin' and softer African concepts, like the secretary bird (which in its hunt for snakes symbolizes the protection of the nation against its enemies) instead of traditional military motifs.⁹²

Rationalist critiques and understandings of 'history' should not underestimate the power of the cultural and political dimensions in the production of history.

The level of exclusion black people still feel is touched upon by Mongane Wally Serote, poet and Executive Chairperson of the new Freedom Park project, in his latest book, *Hyenas*, which deals with redefining the concept of intellectualism in South Africa. He asks, 'When then, do I become a black man, and when does it not matter; when do others become, in my eye and ear and mind and heart – white; and when does it not matter' His answer is that it relates to power, from which base 'status, criteria, attitudes' are created. '... Africa, and its descendants everywhere in the world, know this'.⁹³

Serote explains that the experience of oppression meant that even as he interacted intellectually with whites, self preservation meant there was 'the other side in me' that he always kept in reserve: 'I had been socialized, as a black man, never ever to say certain things when I was with white people. That is why, even today, I have great difficulty filling in any type of forms, or talking about other black people with white people, or even openly saying where I will be tomorrow to white people'.⁹⁴

Serote narrates how, although language accents have shifted with the progression of time, he has perceived various confident criticisms of him by younger white journalists as a coded perpetuation of his status as 'the other',.⁹⁵

For me there are deep meanings in these words. And the superior ground that 'critical' (white) voices often claim cannot be separated from

the context of racialised power. Scholars should be more sensitive to realities and perceptions like these and learn to discern them from opportunistic nationalistic formulations used to exclude others, which some scholars have commented on.⁹⁶

Reassessing sources and frameworks of intellectual authority

Eddie Maloka is one of very few African PhD history graduates in South Africa. He contends it was premature of the revisionists to celebrate their achievement of having rewritten history, 'not least because this self-appointed decolonisation mission was a whites-only affair'.⁹⁷

For Maloka - and the point has been made often enough elsewhere⁹⁸ - the radical tradition really stems from the liberation struggle. Contrary to the radical 'revival' claims of the revisionist historians, the 'one particular character of the radical tradition in South Africa was their association with the liberation movement...'. This 'indigenous radical tradition', he explains, stems from 'the emergence of the [19th century] missionary-trained African intellectuals, as well as the introduction of Marxism in South Africa at the turn of the 20th century'.⁹⁹

There is a black intellectual lineage, in writing, that goes back to Tiyo Soga and the first writings in English and the indigenous languages in the early mission and independent newspapers like *Indaba*, *Isigidimi sama Xhosa*, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, *Izwi Labantu*, *Tsala ea Becoana*, *Ilanga lase Natal*, *Naledi ea Lesotho*, *Abantu Batho* etcetera from the 1860s onwards.¹⁰⁰

I first became aware of these early intellectual expressions twenty years ago while completing a Ph.D on the political mobilization of the 'school people' in the 19th century Eastern Cape.¹⁰¹ When I pointed out the intellectual continuity between these 'first generation' activists and the later period, academic mentors cautioned that I was pushing the point and in danger of making ahistorical connections.¹⁰² But, as people have become more visible post-1994, these lineages have surfaced more clearly, and shown this black intellectual tradition to have had a gritty integrity and a remarkable wholeness and resilience. Many prominent South Africans have direct connections back to that first generation of literate politicians who started the first proto-nationalist organizations.

For example, S.E.K. Mqhayi, 19th century South African Native Congress activist and renowned 'poet of the people', who left an indelible impression on a young Nelson Mandela,¹⁰³ is the grandfather of current UNISA Vice Chancellor, Barney Pityana, and former Director General of Foreign Affairs, Siphosiso Pityana. In 1902, the Native Congress started the Queen Victoria Native College Scheme which aimed to create an institution for higher education for Africans.¹⁰⁴

The famous writer and activist, Sol Plaatje, is the grandfather of Thumi Molefe, first lady of the North West province, married to Premier Popo Molefe.

Noyi Balfour, a contemporary of Rev Tiyo Soga in the 1860s, is a forefather of Ngconde Balfour, current Minister of Sport.¹⁰⁵

The early Lovedale luminary, John Knox Bokwe, was the father of Frieda Mathews (the first African woman university graduate in South Africa, who married Prof Z.K. Matthews), grandfather of Deputy Minister Joe Matthews, and great grandfather of Naledi Pandor, former university lecturer and current Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces in Parliament.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the prominent mission-educated Kholwa family, the Msimangs from Edenvale, produced Richard and Selby Msimang and, later Mavuso Msimang, who went into exile and is currently CEO of the South African National Parks.¹⁰⁷ The CEO of Freedom Park, Lindiwe Gadd is another such product from KwaZulu/Natal. Her grandfather is Chief Albert Lutuli whose uncle, Martin Lutuli, was the first president of the Natal Native Congress in 1900.¹⁰⁸

Dr J.S. Moroka and D.D.T. Jabavu, political contemporaries of Chief Lutuli in the 1930s to 1950s, were similarly related to the first generation of mission-educated political spokespersons; this time the respective links were John M. Nyokong of the Thaba Nchu-based Becoana Mutual Improvement Association and John Tengo Jabavu, perhaps the most important leader of 'native opinion' in the late 19th century. He started the first independent black newspaper in 1884 at the age of 23 and was also one of the first proponents of the Inter State Native College scheme from which the present day University of Fort Hare emerged in 1918.¹⁰⁹

The Sishuba's from Oxkraal and Kamastone near Queenstown – John Alfred and Isiaiha Goda Sishuba – were close allies of Jabavu senior. Descendants today include a member of the Nelson Mandela National Museum council and the first team rugby captain of the well-known Queens College. As it happens, the great grandson of Rev Jonas Goduka, leading light in Herschel and founder of the Ethiopian Church around 1900, is the captain of the college's second rugby team¹¹⁰

Scratch the surface and the deep-rootedness and durability of the struggle-linked, mission tradition of public intellectuals (excluded from the institutions of white domination) will reveal itself.

When the University of Fort Hare inaugurated the Z.K Matthews annual lecture in 2000, the main address was given by Thabo Mbeki,¹¹¹ grandson of the early spokesperson from Ngqamakwe, Fkelewu Mbeki, and son of Govan and Ephanette.¹¹² While at school in Queenstown in the 1950s, the President, incidentally, lived with the Moerane family, who produced an editor of The World newspaper, which was banned in the wake of Steve Biko's death.¹¹³

When Mbeki delivered the first Z.K. Matthews lecture, he, the university and the new leadership elite in attendance were paying tribute

more to this indigenous intellectual tradition than to one outstanding intellectual.¹¹⁴

Post-democracy public intellectuals are rediscovering this tradition. Recently, Dr Xolela Mangcu wrote how he came across an article written by his great-grandfather, Gwayi Tyamzashe, in *Isigidmi Sama Xhosa* in 1874, which analysed and socially critiqued 'Life at the diamond fields' at the time.¹¹⁵

Long before the 1970s and 1980s, Roux, Jaffe, Forman and Simons provided materialist analyses of South African history and Rubusana, Calata and other writers in the still under-researched black newspapers had explained the past in liberal and Africanist terms in opposition to the colonial and apartheid narratives.¹¹⁶

A mainstream contemporary historian of South Africa agrees that the revisionist and social historians of the 1970s and 1980s should be more modest about their leadership claims. 'We can see now that they did not invent the wheel', says Prof Robert Edgar of Howard University.¹¹⁷

The long established intellectual lineages and historical explanations outside of the universities and in the 'struggle', played an important part in intellectually subverting the master narratives of white domination and contributing to the multi-faceted construction of the new order over the past few decades.

Jakes Gerwel has noted,

*A distinctive feature of the anti-apartheid liberation struggle was the politico-intellectual dimension informing and underpinning it. There has been a long, consistent tradition of debate and theorizing about the defining nature of society within and over which the struggle was being conducted ... The consistent thread of rationality running through the liberation struggle in a sense predetermined the eventual outcome.*¹¹⁸

These intellectual lineages and traditions will have to be integrated more wholly into the intellectual and academic narratives of South Africa in future. Not as own-affairs footnotes in a bigger story of academic history, but as part of the defining intellectual patterns in South Africa's development, of which the contribution of the academic historians is a subtext.

Fort Hare University is one of the bases being set up to reconstitute this 'non-official' intellectual tradition in an institutional way. Since the unbannings in 1990, when the university was retaken from the apartheid/Bantustan leadership, and Oliver Tambo was appointed Chancellor, it has self-consciously been recast as an academic fountainhead with a special, linked purpose in the new democracy.¹¹⁹ The decision by the ANC and other components of the liberation movement to deposit their archives at Fort Hare,¹²⁰ and the creation of other such centres of official memory, like the UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archives, have been an important part of the academic project

to reconstitute this indigenous struggle-linked tradition – and, ultimately, perhaps, the whole historical profession in South Africa.

A post-colonial scenario

The environment in which the historical profession operates has changed significantly in the past decade. South Africa is reshaping itself as a democracy. The goal is to enable those who were marginalized in the past to become full citizens. History has a high priority in this process of societal reconstruction. This can be seen at every level; from government investments in heritage to the active support of President Mbeki for Freedom Park and SADET, the Speaker of Parliament's millennium recovery project, the repatriation of the remains of Sarah Baartman, the ANC Youth League's reburial of Anton Lembede, through to street-name changes and memory projects in a hundred different localities.

The democratization process offers the historical profession many opportunities. Historians comfortable in the new post-democracy intellectual and political frameworks, like June Bam of the South African History Project and Julia Wells of Rhodes University, for example, are providing new leaderships in this respect.

Contrary to the doom-and-gloom scenarios described elsewhere, Wells contends that she has 'never seen a more exciting time to be doing historical work'. According to her, 'the demand for fresh history and fresh views has never been greater and it is coming from government, the private sector and the general public'. She sees 'virtually unlimited possibilities' in a critical practice which locates itself in the 'special needs of South Africa as it redefines itself in the post-apartheid era'.¹²¹

According to Wells, this means

*An approach to history which largely coincides with current priorities at government level, including the reformulation of a positive national consciousness, healing and rectifying the injuries of the past and job creation. [Moreover, it] involves putting not only historical information, but also the processes of developing the meanings and relevance of that historical information, into the public sphere. It requires putting history to work in service to the public in a clearly strategised, guided and aggressive way.*¹²²

The 'development history' and heritage approaches she talks about can be seen as extensions of the popular history of the 1980s and the public history of the 1990s in the context of the 2000s. Now, instead of 'developing historical awareness to fortify dedicated resistance cadres', however, the emphasis is on 'developing it for everyone', including international audiences, according to Wells. As with the UWC intellectual project discussed earlier, it can be argued that this approach is not inimical to critical scholarship, but underlies a critical academic praxis in the South African context.

One of South Africa's foremost historians since the 1970s, Colin Bundy, has expressed the hope that the project of 'narrating the nation' in the post-democratic period will not forfeit nuance, contradiction, complexity and multiple explanation. For him, in the best scenario approach

*School texts should reflect recent and current debates about the past; the approach to the past should be inclusive and democratic; the approach to historical knowledge should be analytical and explanatory; skills and content should be inseparable so that the curriculum conveys a sense of how knowledge is produced and history not presented as a set of facts.*¹²³

Beyond this 'model textbook approach', which roughly equates with the History and Archaeology Panel's assessment of the nature, value and values of history touched on earlier, he wishes for 'convergence between the political theorists who favour democracy as the keystone of nation-building and those histories where ... approaches place a premium on the democratic possibilities of the discipline'. Moreover, as a new nation is built, 'shared recollection should remain an aspiration for academic historians.'¹²⁴

The argument I make in this paper is for a fusion of, rather than crude distinction between, this standards-based analysis and Wells's engagement approach. This would at once enable the historical profession to expand its skills-base, opportunities and status and, without compromising a critical role, allow it to participate actively in the process of democratization and national reconstruction or nation-building, thereby shrinking the current distance between the profession and the main societal change forces.¹²⁵

For this to happen, however, a tired academic history profession needs to re-examine and reposition itself unambiguously within a post-colonial framework, in terms of both attitude and action.

Nuttall and Wright have explained that 'many historians have responded to pressures for change only reluctantly, and ...some have sought to resist it'¹²⁶ Current scepticism about the new approaches and the unfolding situation is rooted not only in academic arguments, but sometimes reveals a certain political, generational and racial defensiveness, and retreat into safe refuges. This needs to be addressed by facing up to the issues of race, power and production discussed above.

Similarly, while political and popular calls for South African history to be re-written might be disconcerting and sign of basic ignorance for the generation of historians who could say in 1990 that they had rewritten South African history, the validity of such calls should be understood.¹²⁷ They are occurring within the context of broad societal renewal. They are not so much a rejection of revisionist scholarship – and the often high quality of the work it has produced – as a sign of a powerful consciousness about the vast exclusions of the past, and a

desire to participate in and own the process of building new understandings and identities.

The resolution of the crisis in the 'history' profession, which is as much internally-rooted as externally-generated, lies in black South Africans getting 'voice'. If those who fear the sweeping off the table of 30 years of work at a stroke can recognize this, the current disempowering defensiveness could be turned into an empowering engagement.

At his inauguration in June 2002, the new UPE Rector, Prof Rolf Stumpff, apologized for the role of the university in the apartheid past.¹²⁸ This was a bold move following the silences of the professions at the TRC. Through one symbolic gesture he empowered himself and the university in the new context.

The white academic history establishment could learn from this. To draw back somewhat from the confident 1990 assertions of Bozzoli on behalf of the 'revisionists' that South African history had been 'rewritten', and to share 'authority' by acknowledging the continued racialised nature and limitations of the profession, would do no harm.¹²⁹

South Africa is in a post-colonial situation where the 'whole system' of academic knowledge production and history is being challenged because of past and present racial exclusions.

The recognition that historical debates in the period ahead will be shaped significantly by the political and intellectual movements and forces that spearheaded the struggle for democracy, and today hold the reigns of power in the new democracy, is a good starting point for academic rethinking of the historical studies project in South Africa.

Heritage with its relatively accessible public, oral and 'living' history dimensions, political relevance and greater level of black leadership and involvement will play an important role in this. The growth of the heritage sector is a visible indication of the broadening of historical studies in general over the past decade. The claim of heritage to be 'history' can no longer be denied.

In a real sense 'heritage' is the advance guard of post-colonial history in South Africa and the developments there presage the changes to come in the professional history sphere at the universities.

One of foremost writers produced by our country, Peter Abrahams, reflecting on the twentieth century from a mountain-top in Jamaica, observed that:

'How an enslaved people come to be free, the institutions and patterns of association they fashion as part of the struggle for that freedom, usually determines the nature of that society'.¹³⁰

He could have been writing about the changing historical landscape and the future of the historical profession in South Africa when he penned these words.

Footnotes

(Footnotes to come - please contact the writer at andreodendaal@absamail.co.za if you would like these sent to you. As emphasised at the beginning , this paper is work-in-progress. Comments and suggestions would be appreciated.

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