



# Museums, Histories and the Dilemmas of Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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# Museums, Histories and the Dilemmas of Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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If it can be said that there is one item that has come to characterize museum displays and collections in post-apartheid South Africa it is the dilemma label. Signaling a need or intent to alter displays or that such changes are in process, these are usually hastily produced on a word processing package, manufactured on an A4 sheet, laminated and then affixed to a wall or window. In 1998, such a label greeted me and my colleagues, Martin Legassick, Ciraj Rassool, Michael Abrahams and Gary Minkley when we visited the McGregor Museum in Kimberley to assist with its new exhibition entitled *Frontiers* [fig. 1]. The aim of the exhibition was to construct a racially inclusive past of the people of the Northern Cape. At the museum's entrance, alongside a sign about a Sol Plaatje exhibition was a notice that read, 'The displays in this museum are currently under renovation. We apologise for any inconvenience' [fig. 2].

Several years later I started conducting research on changing histories in museums in the Eastern Cape and visited the East London Museum. Its claim to fame is that it houses a coelacanth caught nearby in 1938 [fig. 3]. Named *latimeria chalumnae* after the museum's director, Marjorie Courtenay Latimer, it is proclaimed rather bizarrely to be a 'living fossil'. In this museum the dilemma label was much more elaborate. Rather than signalling that change was happening in the museum, it outlined a process of consultation with communities. Visitors were invited to share their 'interests and concerns' about the museum [fig. 4]. Since that visit in 2003 very little has in fact changed in the museum. Arguably the most expansive alteration was a new display that placed coelacanth research at the forefront of environmental education and capacity building. A temporary exhibition on the 50th anniversary of Women's Day in 2006 was, in an absolutely extraordinary design decision, displayed in its animal gallery.

Another work in progress that is taking place in the Eastern Cape is in Grahamstown. The old Settlers Memorial Museum in Grahamstown has been re-named the Historical Museum and is in the process of altering its hall that presented the 1820 settlers from Britain as bearers of 'their cultural traditions throughout South Africa' [fig. 5]. In the new display are some of the artefacts from this older exhibition. Directly opposite, with a vivid red backdrop, is an exhibition of Xhosa lifestyles. The dilemma label reads: 'The Settler Gallery is being renovated to reflect the interaction and changing lifestyles of various groups

on the Eastern Cape frontier during the 19th Century. The renovations will be complete by the end of 2007. We apologise for any inconvenience'.

But dilemma labels can be much more elaborate and have a greater sense of permanence. One of the most extensive was installed when the diorama scene of a hunter-gatherer camp in the nineteenth century—more widely known as the bushman diorama, or even as 'The diorama'—was closed at IZIKO South African Museum in April 2001 [fig. 6]. Through archiving and affixing a dilemma label to the screen that concealed the diorama, the museum, in the words of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, had inadvertently created one of the most powerful displays. Instead of being overtly didactic it challenged visitors to think about the politics of exhibiting.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this powerful exhibition is now also closed to the public.

Finally, adjacent to the archived diorama, there is probably the most permanent dilemma label in South Africa. In the African Cultures Gallery of IZIKO South African Museum, a series of labels asks viewers to consider whether the displays and the labels in the gallery—sometimes referred to as the ethno wing—perpetuate ethnic and racialised stereotypes of African people as undeveloped and unchanging [fig. 7].

## Out of Touch?

This gallery was constructed in the 1970s and since that time approaches to exhibiting African cultures have changed.

Do the exhibits create the impression that all black South Africans live in rural villages, wear traditional dress and use only hand-made utensils? What about those people who live and work in towns and travel abroad or become industrialists? Do they not challenge the conventional ethnic stereotypes?

African culture is not static. Why, then, are many labels in the gallery written in the present tense, as if time had stood still?

There have been some modifications to the gallery—the display of the Lydenburg heads and a Zulu beadwork exhibit—but these have been relatively minor. The dilemma notice was installed in 1993 and is still on display.

At the same time as these dilemma labels were being installed in museums the discipline of history in South

Africa underwent what some would characterize as a crisis. Through highlighting the secondary and tertiary educational sectors, it has been pointed out that the numbers of student enrollments for history has dramatically declined, history as a subject has at times been under threat in the school curriculum, and there have been few new historians and little fresh historical writing emerging.<sup>2</sup> This notion of crisis in the 1990s and into the new millennium harks back, with longing and some sense of desperation, to the issues and debates of the 1970s and 80s when South African history was supposedly flourishing. The number of monographs, edited collections and journal articles that were published largely in a social history paradigm of history-from-below in the 1980s, the ever-increasing employment of oral history methodologies in that period, the production of a series of popular histories on topics ranging from beer-halls to criminality (that drew upon the extensive research undertaken by historians associated with radical Marxist scholarship), are all pointers to the boom in 'alternative visions and practices' under the most severe conditions of political repression.<sup>3</sup> In a special issue of the *Radical History Review* in February 1990 that attempted to give a critical overview of radical historiography in South Africa in the 1980s, the commentaries on the popular texts enthused over their potential to contribute to the liberation of history and of apartheid and to constructing a viable and inclusive future for all who live in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> Coupled with what has been described as 'a remarkable hunger for history among black South Africans... an appetite for the past' as history was constantly called upon in the various tasks of the liberation struggles,<sup>5</sup> an image has been created of a historiographical 'golden age' between 1960 and 1990:

more works about the past were published in those three decades than in the preceding three centuries. Centres for the study of South African history flourished . . . In the years between the tragedy of Sharpeville and Mandela's triumphant emergence from prison, historians of many different tendencies saw their research as a useful political tool in the fight against injustice.<sup>6</sup>

Yet at the very moment when the gold should have glistened, instead a curtain of gloom and despair was drawn across history within the academy. There emerged an apparent lack of interest in history across most sections of society. Expectations that 'history would be emancipated and all South Africans be provided with the opportunity to uncover and inscribe innumerable pasts',<sup>7</sup> seemingly proved to be illusory.

In this talk I want to think through the dilemmas that have been presented around the category of history in the academy and in the museum and to place them together as a way to think through the role of the public historian. In the parlance of the US academy, although there are some differences around the category, 'Public History' largely

refers to academically trained historians imparting their skills and knowledge to institutions such as museums. Although at times an ideal presented may be one of a 'shared authority' over making meanings, in practice it is the methodologies and expertise of the academy that are paramount.<sup>8</sup> The notion of engagement with the public in the process of making histories that this talk presents, is one that disavows the 'trickle down' process that relies on ideas of outreach, upliftment and access while holding on to academic expertise. If one begins instead to see institutions of public culture as 'critical social locations where knowledge and perceptions [of the public sphere] are shaped, debated, imposed, challenged, and disseminated', then the historian takes on a somewhat different role.<sup>9</sup> It is more the case that one enters into discussions and debates with these institutions as a series of knowledge transactions. One's expertise as an historian is constantly being challenged, shaped and re-shaped in these negotiations over the past as different historical knowledges are evoked and articulated. What Ciraj Rassool has called 'the mystique of scientific knowledge' is, consequently, shattered.<sup>10</sup>

I want to try and formulate this position by firstly juxtaposing what has been presented as the reasons for the crisis in the South African history in the academy with museums that are responding to the dilemmas of change and making new histories. Using these juxtapositions I then want to try and work toward positioning a brief for the public historian. Setting out on this route I will consider some of the engagements of historians in the public domain in post-apartheid South Africa, then move on to examples of two museums where I have both been doing research and working with the museum to inscribe new histories, the Dias Museum complex in Mossel Bay and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum.

## The Dilemmas of History

The impression of dramatic decline in South African history since the 1990s is a common thread amongst most historiographical commentators. I took the liberty of selecting quotations from some of these arguments that outline reasons for the decline and pasted them, temporarily, on the walls of some museums. This was not for a very long period (for the most an hour) and it was not intended to gauge responses but rather to illustrate a lecture I was presenting. By creating my own dilemma labels I wanted to consider how aligning changes (or at least prospective changes) around the category of history in museums with what has been presented as crisis in South African history can assist in thinking about museums, the discipline of history and relationships between them.

I pasted my first label in one of South Africa's newest museums, the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. It is

effectively the only museum in the Western Cape province that is based in a township, one of the dormitory areas on the edges of apartheid cities created for people who were racially classified as 'native', later as 'bantú', and then as specified ethnic entities such as 'Xhosa', 'Tswana' or 'Zulu'. In the 1990s as part of the Reconstruction and Development programme, the new ANC led-government decided to upgrade the hostel type accommodation originally designed for male migrant workers in the township of Lwandle, forty kilometres outside Cape Town, and turn them into family units. This provided the catalyst for an initiative to develop a Lwandle museum on the basis of a preserved hostel and an old community hall. The museum sees itself as serving as a reminder of a system of migrant labour, single sex hostels and the control of black workers through an identity document which controlled access to employment and residence in urban areas—the infamous pass book. But the museum has struggled from its inception to form a museum community. There is no inherent value in the museum for many residents of Lwandle. Many view it merely as a tourist site while more pressing needs are housing and employment. Yet, through its exhibitions, like *Jimballi ZeKhaya* (Stories of Home), sports and cultural activities, collaborations with the nearby Khanyolwethu and Simunyene high schools over educational programmes, identifying women and youth ambassadors for the museum, and even entering into discussions over housing, it has slowly begun to develop a museum community. In its permanent exhibition on a panel entitled 'Dreaming of a Beautiful Lwandle' there is a somewhat triumphalist assertion about how what was once intended only as a place for male migrant workers living in isolated barrack-type accommodation has been turned into a community with its own museum. This might be an overstatement but it does signal how the museum has begun to make itself integral in the process of constituting a public citizenry in Lwandle. In this exhibition, adjacent to its title and a photograph of the new family units all with solar heating panels, I pasted a notice quoting one of South Africa's leading historians who (citing with approval the work of the sociologist Heribert Adam) attributed what he claimed was a decline in history to a focus on needs, expectations and aspirations in contemporary South Africa. The dilemma label read: 'The past is now far less important than the immediate future / Okundlulileyo akubalulekanga ukwegqitha ikamva langoku' [fig. 8].<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to Lwandle, which was specifically constructed as a place to accommodate African male workers on the urban periphery, District Six has been part of the city of Cape Town since the 1840s. Historians of Cape Town have described District Six as initially being 'not only ethnically but socially mixed', although by the 1870s it had become largely inhabited by 'the poorer classes'.<sup>12</sup> For the advocates of racial segregation and later apartheid, such an area, close to the city centre, was an anomaly. In the twentieth century, firstly under the banner of slum

clearance and later more explicitly through the Group Areas Act, thousands of people, most of who were racially designated as 'African' or 'coloured', were forced to move from District Six to the Cape Flats. District Six was declared a white group area and in the mid-1960s most of the existing houses were destroyed to make way for anticipated residential development.

The latter hardly occurred, largely as a result of an intensive political campaign that was launched to keep property developers off the land in the 1980s. Memories evoked and images collected through the 'Hand off District Six' campaign provided one of the main impetuses behind the establishment of the District Six Museum in the years of South Africa's transition to democracy. The museum emerged from a 'desire to reassemble and restore the corporeal integrity of District Six through memory'.<sup>13</sup> It is arguably one of the most successful new museums in post-apartheid South and has been lauded for experimenting with new and different narratives that complicate linear notions of history and memory. The District Six Museum functions as a re-instatement of community that is bounded together by different and contrasting memories of place. In its methodological approaches a space has been created 'through which relations of knowledge and varied kinds of intellectual and cultural practices have been brokered and mediated between different sites, institutions and sociological domains'.<sup>14</sup> Acts of visiting, listening, recalling and recording are the modes of establishing a community of memories in what has been described as a process of re-membering. The museum's central image is a map on the floor where ex-residents can inscribe the addresses where they lived and places they recall. Street signs, which were secretly stored away by a man involved in the destruction of the District, serve as a material reminder of what once was, and assert the preservation of memory amidst all the destruction wreaked by apartheid. A large cloth serves not only as a comments type book but also invites recollections of place. The folds and layers of the memory cloth are testament to a museum where histories are being re-made almost daily. It is on this cloth where I placed my second dilemma label. It contained a quotation that ascribed the crisis in South African history to 'the demoralising effects of post-modern critiques'.<sup>15</sup> Post-modernism is interpreted as rendering 'the unquestioned suddenly untenable', making the 'central, decentred', and turning the 'fixed' into 'fluid'.<sup>16</sup> Instead of seeing these moves as bold 'experiment[s] with the boundaries of the historian's genre',<sup>17</sup> South African historians were 'unnerved' by what they perceived as a fundamental challenge to the very essence of history in 'evidence, objectivity [and] truth'.<sup>18</sup> On the memory cloth in the District Six Museum, where a range of multiple, divergent histories were being inscribed, I affixed a sign containing a quotation from an historian who claimed: 'There is a worldwide trend away from history, for which post-modernism

must surely bear some of the blame' [fig. 9].<sup>19</sup>

A third reason that has been propounded for the apparent historiographical crisis has been a strong propensity to produce accounts that are consistent with the dominant frameworks of a new national history. There are various elements that would be considered part of this new national history: assertions of an indigenous precolonial nationhood, a paradigm that continually couples apartheid and resistance, centrality given to the 'emergence' and 'triumph' of the African National Congress in the anti-apartheid struggle, and a narrative of ascending and descending troughs of despair and crests of hope, ultimately carried through to 'victory' by iconic figures, primarily Nelson Mandela, culminating in the emergence of a multicultural South Africa. No other museum has been seen to encompass this narrative more than the Robben Island Museum. Since the transformation of the island from a prison into a museum in 1996 it is the experience of political prisoners from the 1960s that has been the major ingredient of its imaging. The intention is not only to show the many hardships that the prisoners went through, but, perhaps even more importantly to show how they managed to survive, overcome these adversities and retain their sense of humanity. This is encapsulated in the Robben Island promotional slogan, 'Triumph of the Human Spirit' and its successful claim to be a world heritage site. Robben Island, it would appear, has been re-envisioned as the birthplace of the new nation and the quest for national reconciliation.<sup>20</sup>

Many commentators have pointed out that this narrative is primarily inscribed through what has been referred to as 'Mandelaisation'. When visitors arrive on the island they go on two tours: the prison tour and the island tour. On the island tour visitors on the bus are pointed to the wrecks along the coast line, the flora and fauna on the island, the World War Two installations, the graveyard, the lime quarry where political leaders laboured, and the house where the leader of the Pan-African Congress, Robert Sobukwe, was kept in isolation. The prison tour is taken by an ex-political prisoner who takes one to the censor's office, various communal cells and then, the 'centrepiece of the ... tours to Robben Island',<sup>21</sup> cell no 5 in B Block which is pointed to as Mandela's cell. Here the cameras click furiously as visitors desperately take photographs of the cell. This emphasis at Robben Island on Nelson Mandela places the museum in a biographical genealogy of Mandela, through which 'the discursive construction of Nelson Mandela has moved through different phases, from born leader to sacrificial hero to Messiah, culminating in symbolic father with paternal authority in the public sphere'.<sup>22</sup> On Robben Island, Mandela 'has been reinscribed as the father of the reconciled nation'.<sup>23</sup>

Yet the Robben Island Museum is much more complex and contested than these assertions of Mandelaisation represent it as. *Cell Stories Exhibition and Archive* which opened

on the island in 1999 is an example of how the narrative is subverted in what appears to be a national shrine. In a series of single cells in A-Block, 'formerly used by the authorities as an isolation section',<sup>24</sup> items were exhibited which political prisoners regarded as significant to them during their imprisonment. Alongside was a text with some biographical information and a note that indicated how the prisoner accorded significance to the item. Visitors were also encouraged to press an intercom button in the cell and one heard the voice of the prisoner relating their experiences on the island. This exhibition thus allowed the voices of other political prisoners to be heard and exhibited on the Island. *Cell Stories Exhibition and Archive* at the Robben Island Museum was one of the most powerful exhibitions in post-apartheid South Africa. This exhibition 'was innovative in the ways in which prison cells were turned into multimedia memory spaces'. Most importantly *Cell Stories* 'deliberately sought to contest the tendency for history in the public domain to be narrated mainly through "great lives of resistance and reconciliation"'.<sup>25</sup> On a display case showing the shoes that Sazi Veldtman wore in prison (1987-1991), I placed the following label that contained a quote from an historian who was bemoaning the acquiescence of history to the contours of new national history: 'History has lost its edge in terms of questioning authority and power. Now History is being mobilized behind a nationalist narrative' [fig. 10].<sup>26</sup>

Finally, despite the associations with nationalism there is also the sense amongst some academics that the links between politics and history have somehow been diluted. It is unclear what is being articulated in this claim. It may be that academic history had lost its very distinct use value compared to when it was mobilized in struggles against apartheid by different formations who sought to develop appropriate and convincing strategies, positions and tactics. More generally 'History' in the structures, forms and institutions of the apartheid state was a clear enemy that needed to be overthrown. With the demise of the apartheid state that target was somehow dissipated. 'History in South Africa seems to have lost much of its political edge',<sup>27</sup> asserted one of South Africa's historians in a conversation to commemorate the fiftieth edition of the *South African Historical Journal*, the publication of the South African Historical Society. I used this quotation for the label I placed in the new exhibition at the Slave Lodge of Iziko Museums of Cape Town. Memories of slavery at the Cape from the late seventeenth through to the early nineteenth centuries had either been deliberately submerged or reconfigured in the years following emancipation. On the one hand this was through the official propagation of an idea that slavery at the Cape did not bear the hallmarks of plantations in the New World, and somehow took on a much more benign form. In addition, amongst slave descendants themselves there was an almost deliberate process of amnesia as a slave past became a source of embarrassment for some who sought to place

themselves higher up the ladder in the racial hierarchies of colonialism and later apartheid.<sup>28</sup> As a result slavery was hardly invoked in public displays and did not feature in museums whose buildings were associated with slave pasts. When slavery was depicted, it was not to show social and economic conditions but rather to assert a distinct ethnic identity bolstered by apartheid's racial classifications of 'Cape Malay'.<sup>29</sup> Since 1994 though there has been a deliberate attempt to evoke memories of slavery at the Cape in a political move that seeks to create a commonality of oppression. Part of that politics involved the re-naming of the Cultural History Museum as the Slave Lodge. The exhibition *Remembering Slavery* explicitly seeks to resurrect memories of slavery that have been submerged in both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras. A history of the Slave Lodge, a reconstruction of the interior of the slave ship, an illuminated column of memory inscribed with the names of slaves and visual depictions of the journeys on the Indian Ocean slave trade all form part of the exhibition. In the last room that bore the title 'Cultural Echoes' a sign indicated: 'exhibition under construction thank you / uitstalling aan die gang dankie / umboniso uphantsi kolwakhiwo enkosi'.

Items in the room were used to indicate the cultural exchanges and appropriations that took place as clothing, languages, and furniture traversed the world of the Indian Ocean slave trade. On the wall there was a quotation from Patric Tariq Mellet, formerly a printer for the ANC in exile and later a co-founder of the South African Institute for Advancement. Mellet had embarked upon a search for his ancestors whom he describes in his autobiography as 'African Creole': 'two slave sisters, born of slave and Khoi parents, married two French brothers'.<sup>30</sup> In the Slave Lodge building of Iziko Museums of Cape Town his words appear in a large italic script, in white and an off-yellow, on a black wall facing the artifacts. 'All around us every day, we experience the echoes of cultures from Asia and Africa – and the fruits of labour of the enslaved people. This great contribution of so many men and women, our ancestors, has far too long been blotted out by over-amplified colonial narratives'. I placed my label about history's lack of a political edge below the quotation.

## Popular and Public Historians

Obviously I took some liberties with this signage and was somewhat mischievous in taking these quotations, unacknowledged, out of the context in which they were published and placing them in environments where they were not intended to appear and exhibition spaces that largely contradicted their assertions. But presenting these as opposites in quite stark terms, and counterposing them with the 'official' museum dilemma labels, invites one to problematize affiliations between historians, histories and museums. To think through these attachments and

disconnections I thought it would be fitting to start at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1992 when the History Workshop hosted a conference entitled 'Myths, Monuments, Museums: New Premises?' With political transformation and the demise of apartheid seemingly imminent, this conference was asking what form and content histories in the public domain may or may not take in the future. Or to put it much more crudely, as the conference's icon suggested, should the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria, a symbol of Afrikaner nationalist and apartheid history, be pulled down?

It was entirely appropriate that the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand should host such a conference. During the 1980s it was arguably at the forefront of the production of popular histories in South Africa. Drawing upon extensive research undertaken by social historians associated with radical Marxist scholarship into the lives and experiences of the underclasses, much of it making use of oral history methodologies, academics aligned with the History Workshop produced histories in accessible form and language. These included easy to read books, newspaper articles, video productions and slide/tape shows for audiences conceived of as 'popular'.<sup>31</sup>

But popular audiences did not adopt these methods and histories with the enthusiasm that the historians expected. Official platforms and distribution networks of public institutions were circumscribed under the apartheid state. Popular history lessons hardly found their way into schools, museums, television or bookshops. One would have then imagined that these historians would grasp the opportunity the conference offered in 1992 and seek ways for their histories to enter the public domain on a much wider scale. Yet, with a few very notable exceptions, this was not the case. As Ciraj Rassool and I wrote at the time, 'the conference organisers' hopes that historians and other academics would engage in debates about public history were largely unfulfilled'. Academic historians seemed to be unwilling to enter what they saw as the possibly 'tainting atmosphere of policy-formation and real world of lived history'.<sup>32</sup>

The initial cynicism that found expression in 1992 became the basis of much greater reluctance amongst South African historians through the 1990s towards engaging in history in the public domain, except as the purveyors of expertise. It was expressed most strongly in the heritage-history debate of the 1990s that relied very heavily on the work of David Lowenthal.<sup>33</sup> Heritage was seen as somehow a lesser field to history, the latter being regarded as a critical search for truths that were constantly open to scrutiny, debate and discussion, while the former was subject to distortions and manipulations in the interests of politics and/or commerce, often seeking to cast the past as immutable.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps, with hindsight, such skepticism was not surprising given that powerful institutional, disciplinary and political

mediations were constantly in operation in ‘popular history’ in the 1980s. Nicky Rousseau has pointed out how these popular history texts drew upon a hierarchy of history in which prominence was given to history produced through the academy and/or its methodologies. This history, with its claims to rigour and professionalism, was presented as the necessary mediator, ‘more accurate, preferable and centrally more powerful than common sense or popular historical consciousness’. This, she asserted, is no more evident than in the book that I authored in 1988 on behalf of SACHED and the History Workshop, *Write Your Own History*. Here it was the acquisition of historical skills of the profession that was presented as the key for communities to embark upon history writing projects.<sup>35</sup>

This notion of the historian as the scientific expert, trained in a methodology that enables determination, arbitration, analysis and conveying of history, remains a very strong tendency in South African academic circles. Jeff Guy summed up this view most succinctly, when he maintained, that historians are the ‘guardians and propagators of informed, critical, disinterested history’.<sup>36</sup> When called upon by museums and heritage bodies, a response by some historians in the academy has therefore been disengagement. But others have become involved in museums and heritage-type projects, bringing their knowledge and expertise in the discipline as applied historians.<sup>37</sup> Here one can point to the work done by Martin Legassick in the McGregor University of the Witwatersrand and on land claims and by Noor Nieftagodien and Phil Bonner in the Apartheid Museum and the Old Fort in Johannesburg. Although called upon as experts, what emerges from accounts of their work is how they became immersed in discussions, debates and research around the politics and poetics of representation in the public domain.

It is in this area, broadly defined as heritage studies, rather than the practice of heritage, where several historians have been drawn. There has been a proliferation of southern African studies in what can be termed ‘heritage scholarship’ where important issues about the ways that histories come to be constituted in the public domain are critically examined, where the politics of the production, circulation, representation and reception of heritage in a variety of sites are analysed. Some important issues covered in this scholarship are the meanings and politics surrounding the construction of memorial projects and landscapes; how often these are aligned with contemporary political and commercial concerns; the ways several artists have consistently resisted the easy binaries and, through their work, have opened up history to debate and enquiry; frictions between claims to academic expertise and knowledge production in museums; how the museum and heritage field can be read as reflecting transformations in society; the productions of historical meanings in new museums and exhibitions; and, most recently, how heritage

is re-shaping the post-apartheid city, both disturbing and re-affirming the desire lines of modernist planning.<sup>38</sup> In the words of the editors of a special edition of the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, heritage seems to be now deserving of ‘more than contemptuous dismissal’. Instead it ‘demands investigation’ as a signifying practice, raising ‘important questions about changing cultures of state power in the region, globalised networks of interaction, and shifting understandings of citizenship and identity’.<sup>39</sup>

There can be no doubt that the conceptualization of public history that I am presenting can be located in this critical heritage scholarship. Two important ideas are crucial. The first is an emphasis on history as representation. Making use of the work of David Cohen and ES Atieno Odhiambo, it relies upon the notion of ‘multiple locations of historical knowledge’. In all these different locations one can begin to examine how these different histories generate, in Henrietta Lidchi’s words, ‘representations and attribute value’. Museums, as one of these locations of history, are not merely to be conceptualized as institutions of conservation, display and education but rather as sites that are underpinned by, and present, ‘notions of what the world is or should be’.<sup>40</sup>

But these representations do not emerge on their own accord. The second key idea underlying much of the research in public history is to consider how histories are represented and created in the public domain, so that, ‘in approaching the “production of history” one is also approaching history as production’.<sup>41</sup> Doing history therefore involves investigating the different forms, practices, genres, methodologies and social contexts that went into the production of histories.

But, being a public historian involves more than investigating the poetics of representation and the politics of production. What such formulations sometimes overlook are the many different authors and the previous histories, which are often at odds with each other, in creating the historical product. As Nsizwa Dlamini has shown in relation to projects of Zulu memorialisation, the pasts that are produced are often the result of negotiations and conflicts between opposing groups over its constituent elements, what events and personalities should be included and excluded and how they should be represented.<sup>42</sup> By highlighting the different versions or fragments of history, one can analyse the conflicts that may emerge in processes of producing histories, the constraints placed on memory, the privileging of certain collective memories as public memory, and the marginalisation of other versions of the past. One can begin to show the processes and regimes of exclusion and domination that lead to individuals and events not making what Premesh Lalu in a most evocative phrase has called the ‘cut of history’.<sup>43</sup>

Secondly, while the concept of the production of history



seeks to understand public ways of knowing, it does not set out to engage with the public and their ways of knowing. Many historians are actively involved in ongoing struggles to make different histories and what is at stake through these deliberate engagements is a practice that contests and effectively decentres the expertise of historians in the academy. Instead of casting the historian as a consultant who conveys history (usually defined as an empiricist who can verify facts) to the public, the notion of practice is concerned both to understand the politics of production and the relationships with, and immersion in, the cut and thrust of making history.

### The Bartolomeu Dias Museum and Incorrect History

Let me briefly turn to two examples where I have worked as a public historian and where some of the processes I have referred to can be seen. The first is one of the newest of South Africa's 'old' museums, the Bartolomeu Dias Museum complex in the Western Cape town of Mossel Bay. The museum opened in February 1989, almost a year prior to the moment, which we now know, heralded the imminent formal demise of apartheid, the unbanning of political organizations and the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners. It is one of the most popular museums in contemporary South Africa, drawing approximately 130,000 people annually.

The largest building on the campus is a Maritime Museum that celebrates and pays homage to a festival held in February 1988: the quincentenary commemorations of the rounding of the Cape by the Portuguese captain, Bartolomeu Dias. Artefacts, photographs and ephemera produced for and derived from this festival give this institution its claims to permanence and authenticity as a museum. Undoubtedly the highlight for visitors, and the primary reason for the museum's popularity, is the presence of the caravel that sailed from Lisbon to Mossel Bay at the end of 1487 [fig. 11]. The opportunity to go on board, walk around the deck, stand beneath the masts and then to descend to view the sleeping quarters on what is presented as a full-scale model of a 15th century caravel that looks 'exactly like its predecessor' from the outside entices the visitor. Although the ship is stationary, and a notice does tell visitors that the replica differed from the original in that it had 'luxuries' for the crew, an engine and modern navigational equipment, visitors to the museum imagine themselves at sea in a 15th (and not a 20th) century historical drama.

Given the celebration of the 1988 Dias festival in the Maritime Museum at Mossel Bay, and its reliance upon the ephemera created for the festival for its collection and display, it seemed necessary that I find out more about the commemoration, how it was organized, the images

it depicted and how these then came to constitute the museum. I started working through a series of newspaper clippings located in the museum's library. Many of these were in the same vein as the representations in the museum, casting the events as an historical reenactment and celebrating the occasion. But as I was looking through the clippings I was completely startled by one that I came across. It is from page five of the Afrikaans-language Sunday newspaper *Rapport*, dated 31 January 1988, and contains a story by Nico van Gijzen that is headlined, 'White Team Takes the Place of Blacks Involved in Accident'. A smaller, less prominent, supra-heading reads 'Dias Festival Opens with Gesture of Sympathy'. Above the headlines are two large photographs alongside each other. The first, entitled 'Bus Disaster', is a news-type documentary photograph in a horizontal frame (across three columns) showing a tangled wreck of a large vehicle in amongst a forest of trees. In the middle ground are a group of men, most of them dressed in camouflage type uniforms, with their backs to the camera, looking towards the bus. Two of this group are partly facing the camera. Their attention is directed towards the bodies of accident victims that appear, scattered in a clearing, in the foreground of the photograph. The photograph is captioned 'POLICEMEN help injured black colleagues after their bus that was taking them to the Dias festival, crashed over the edge of the Robinson pass. Thirteen constables died in the accident'. Alongside the crash photograph is another, over one-and-a-half columns entitled 'Festival goes ahead'. In contrast to the first photograph this one is spatially orientated in a vertical direction and is a deliberately posed group portrait. Three women and a man, all with broad smiles, face the camera. The women are in the foreground and appear in full-body length. The head and shoulders of the man in the background are visible. He wears a white shirt with lapels and a white cap with a badge attached. Two dark-haired women frame the photograph, standing on either side of an elevated chair, dressed in a knee-length skirt and shorts respectively. Sitting on the chair, at the central focal point, is a fair-haired woman, wearing a dark top and pair of thigh length shorts. The group appears to be inside a boat. The caption reads: 'The first of a group of eight girls that are competing for the crown of Miss Dias, went to look at the bridge of the SAS Protea in the harbour at Mossel Bay. The navigator, Lt Jaybee de Wet, was at hand to show them around. The three in the photograph are (f.l.t.r.) Gaby Martin, 19 of Pretoria, Lara Field, 19, of Cape Town and Maria Ferreira, 20, of Pretoria'. Steve Eggington is credited with the photo.<sup>44</sup>

These are two very different types of photographs. One documents an event as news, a 'real event', that appears as 'tragic', 'distant' and 'exceptional'.<sup>45</sup> The other is deliberately staged as publicity heralding and anticipating the Dias festival. Why were these specific images being placed beside each other, in a weekend Afrikaans language newspaper, on the eve of the festival proceedings in Mossel

Bay? Part of the explanation lies in an analysis of photo-journalism and how certain images come to be created, selected and then positioned and captioned in newspapers. What is also as important though is to try and account for what might be called, the photographic moments. Why, for instance, was this group of policemen, racially classified in news reports as “black”, making their way to a festival of “European” arrival? Why was the Dias festival, which was centrally about an historical re-enactment of an ‘event of history’, being depicted, alongside, primarily as a moment of publicity?<sup>46</sup>

What I have argued is that this juxtaposition can be tracked through the multiple contradictions that surfaced in the making of a festival that attempted to depict late apartheid South Africa as a harmonious multicultural society. Firstly, there was very little historical evidence to sustain the script for the re-enactments. And that evidence we have was seemingly inconsistent with the images the festival sought to depict. The only evidence we do have of Dias’s landing are from the diaries of Vasco Da Gama’s voyage several years later. It tells of how local inhabitants threw rocks at Dias and his crew as they tried to obtain fresh water. With his bow and arrow, Dias shot at and killed one of the locals. Secondly, there was the problem of associations with the apartheid state. Although there were claims to multiculturalism, the festival committee was convened under the auspices of the whites only Department of National Education. Compounding this problem was the small matter concerning the beach on which Dias was scheduled to land in 1988. It was a beach that was set apart for ‘whites only’. This led to a massive boycott of the proceedings. With a boycott confounding the attempts at providing a multicultural imagery for Dias, it was the bus crash referred to earlier, on the day the festival was due to open, that almost entirely shattered any remaining hopes the organisers might still have retained for producing what they called a ‘spectacle of colour’.<sup>47</sup>

Confronted with the manifold problems of how to sustain an image of a multi-cultural event the festival organizers resorted to denial, concealment and masquerade in an attempt to stage the past for both Bartolomeu Dias and the South African president, PW Botha. Despite their obvious involvement, there were constant denials by PW Botha’s government that it sponsored and organized the proceedings. In line with the reformist politics of the apartheid state, selected people racially designated as coloured, Indian and African were appointed to the various festival committees. The incident that took place when Dias arrived in 1488 was concealed from the stage of history. And, in one of the ironies of the late 1980s, it was only through whites rendering themselves as black that the festival, which was constructed around a moment of European arrival, could proceed. A small tableau of Dias’s landing was re-enacted on the beach of Mossel Bay. To meet Dias and two members of his crew were actors

representing the indigenous inhabitants, who had gathered around a fire. As they saw Manuel Escorcio, who played the part of Dias, land they backed away, allowing him to proceed to a nearby spring for a drink of water. But what made spectators gasp in astonishment was that the actors who portrayed the indigenous local population were a ‘group of whites’ in black mask. In a most astonishing reversal ‘whites’ had to masquerade as ‘blacks’ in order to perform apartheid’s last festival.

The boycott does not feature at all in the museum, the re-enactment of Dias’s landing is virtually unseen in one photograph in a corner of the gallery and there is no mention of the bus accident and the death of the police gymnasts from Hammanskraal. In the Maritime Museum of the Dias Museum complex they have all been hidden from history.

Meanwhile an alcove contains an exhibition with miniature dioramas containing depictions of encounters between the early travelers from Europe and the indigenous population. Inside the alcove is a dilemma label alerting visitors to problems with the display:

#### Incorrect Information

The Bartolomeu Dias Museum Complex is aware of a number of grammatical and historical errors in the text of this exhibition. The exhibition is displayed as it was donated and presented to the Museum Complex, and we therefore request that queries for information required be addressed to the staff of this Museum.

For the historian as the guardian of truth, this is almost a clarion call for help, especially when the exhibition referred to employs racial stereotypes to describe the indigenous population that Dias encountered. But removing the offensive label and replacing it with another more accurate one will not solve the dilemma for the museum that is now embarking upon a process of changing its history on display. Its dilemma, to all intents and purposes, can be summed up in one question: what to do with the caravel? It is the museum’s attraction, but it is also a symbol of apartheid’s last festival.

I have been involved in discussions and meetings with the museum management and staff over the last two years about the possibilities for altering the museum’s displays. In these discussions I have tried to argue that the museum should attempt to reflect upon its own history and the conflicts that went into the making of the 1988 Dias festival. To put it quite starkly, the essence of my argument is that the caravel should remain but that it should be shown to be the bearer, not of Bartolomeu Dias, but of the contradictions that went into the apartheid state attempting to assign itself a multicultural past. To make this the central theme of the

museum would however offend several of the inhabitants of Mossel Bay who regard the festival merely as a depiction of history. The museum has thus, in its transformation brief, attempted to re-cast itself as a museum of the people of Mossel Bay. It wants to ‘focus on local history, culture and the natural environment’, to ‘represent voices from all the inhabitants of Mossel Bay’ and to ‘redress the imbalances depicted by the Bartolomeu Dias Museum by producing new, logically themed, educational and stimulating inclusive exhibitions that promote social cohesion’.<sup>48</sup> Essentially, instead of its legacy as a symbol of attempts to reform apartheid through notions of multiculturalism, it wants to become a post-apartheid multicultural museum. But perhaps some of my suggestions have been heeded. Included in the transformation brief is this objective: ‘To provide an authentic interpretation of the caravel in its 1988 context’.<sup>49</sup> While I would expressly disavow any notions of an ‘authentic interpretation’, it does seem that the space will be opened, if only hesitantly, for the museum to interrogate its own past.

### Should There Be a Museum in Lwandle?

I want to end this talk by referring to what must be the most devastating dilemma label that a museum has ever encountered. I earlier referred to the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum that was developed on the basis of a preserved migrant labour hostel, Hostel 33 [fig. 12]. When the opportunity arose of also being able to take occupation of an old community hall, these plans expanded. On 1 May (officially Workers Day in South Africa) 2000, the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum was officially opened (it had opened its doors the previous year) by the poet, journalist, and ex-resident of Lwandle, Sandile Dikeni, when he symbolically broke the chains of the past. The exhibition *Memorising Migrancy*, consisting mainly of photographs collected in Lwandle by the museum’s first curator, Bongani Mgijima, was somewhat sparse in the cavernous interior of the community hall [fig. 13]. But what those who were in attendance might remember from that day was a notice that the residents of Hostel 33, placed on the door of the hostel. The notice read:

We the residents of Room 33 deside to write this notice desagree with you about this room to be a messeum. Firstly give us accomodation before you can get this room. Thank you. From room 33.

Nearly all hostel dwellers had been provided with new, upgraded, family-type accommodation, but not the residents of Hostel 33. So, for the staff and the board of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum one aspect of its operations as a museum has become negotiating with local authorities and building contractors to find new accommodation for residents of Hostel 33. At almost every meeting of the board of the Lwandle Museum since 2000

Hostel 33 has been on the agenda. And when it seemed the issues would be resolved when new accommodation was located for the residents, a new group of people moved in. In the minutes of the museum board dated 29 January 2007 one reads:

Hostel 33: This still remains a major concern. Some people who were living there have got houses and have moved out, but a new group of people has moved in without the permission of the museum. The museum has no authority to evict them but Lunga is to ask Simon to make a notice indicating that this is museum property.<sup>50</sup>

The notice went up but the following month the issue was once again on the agenda.

Hostel 33: The problems still continue. Mrs. Makhabane suggested going to ask the mother of the children in Hostel 33 to come to the museum for a meeting. In the end it was decided that we need to ask Xolani Sotashe (the Lwandle councillor) to assist and to possibly call in the police.

What is apparent in the negotiations over Hostel 33 as an artefact and a display space is that a way to begin thinking through the history of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum is not as a narrative of a community museum but as an ongoing struggle over the establishment and form of a museum community.

From initial research, and being involved with the museum as a board member, and sometimes researcher and editor for its exhibitions, I anticipate that this will be the framework that will inform the project that I have embarked upon to write a history of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. Lwandle, from its inception, consisted entirely of hostel type accommodation for workers who mainly serviced the nearby fruit and canning industry and the surrounding municipalities of Strand, Gordon’s Bay and Somerset West. These hostels were only intended for single men and notions of community were circumscribed within this world where the labourer was merely seen as a temporary sojourner in the city. Lwandle was never constructed as a community. In terms of apartheid, as Bongani Mgijima and Vusi Buthelezi have argued, the only form of official community for people classified as African was in a bounded rural environment, identified in racial and ethnic categories.<sup>51</sup>

Given the way that the migrant labour system was based upon a deliberate use of ethnic categories, the Lwandle museum deliberately rejects apartheid notions of community. Instead it seeks to establish the spatial configuration of Lwandle and all its residents as its immediate community. But there have been other forces that have attempted to shape the museum and the heritage

it preserves into one that depicts an essential rural timeless Africaness in an urban setting, often cast as ethnicity. This primarily comes about as the museum tries to attract a community of international tourists. Placed in an extremely vulnerable position, with little or no possibility of funding on the immediate horizon, the museum, in order to establish itself, found that it was being asked ‘to dance to the tune of tourism’.<sup>52</sup> The result as Buthelezi and Mgiijima tell us, is that the intention to portray the political and economic history of migrancy ‘slips almost magically’ into ‘comfortable stereotypes of an African “authenticity”’.<sup>53</sup>

But this pressure to preserve a heritage that is cast within African tradition is not only coming from the tourist sector. When the City of Cape Town drew up plans to upgrade the museum building and to landscape the environment the motifs it drew upon were those that were seen to represent Africa and the Eastern Cape.<sup>54</sup> A third set of pressures to depict Lwandle as an ethnic African place has come from within the several quarters of the museum sector. This is expressed in the following terms: the museum should show where the people of Lwandle are from.

The museum has responded to this call but in an unexpected way, in a new permanent exhibition, *Iimbali zeKhaya*—Stories of Home, which opened in October 2005. Designed and curated by Jos Thorne in collaboration with researchers from the museum and the museum board, it draws upon the heritage preservation work of the museum, particularly the interviews that were carried out by museum staff at the time (Vusi Buthelezi, Kutala Vuba, Bonke Tyhulu and Lungiswa Tekka). The exhibition, making use of this research and photographs collected, seeks to depict the ambiguity and meanings attached to the concept of home by the residents of Lwandle [fig. 14]. These are stories that tell how Lwandle is not considered a home by some but merely a place of work. For others it is a permanent home where they want to be buried. Others still consider Lwandle as one of two (or maybe even three) homes. Home, as it appears in the exhibition, is most definitely not a reference to a designated ethnic rural space where the planners of apartheid sought to place the migrant worker. The exhibition thus narrates, visually and textually, the stories of the people who live in Lwandle today and their experiences in the hostels. It tells about their homes in the Eastern Cape and in Lwandle. It ends with a somewhat triumphalist assertion about how what was once intended only as a place for male migrant workers has been turned into a community with its own museum.

It is very tempting to end this account of the museum on this triumphalist note and refer to an event that took place at the museum to commemorate women’s month in August 2007 that was organised by museum staff, Lunga Smile, Lungiswa Tekka, Nobungwalisa Ngcani, together with an intern from the African Programme of Museum and Heritage Studies, Nungu Nungu. After many months

of negotiation, the group of youths that had taken up residence in Hostel 33, had moved out in June 2007 and the hostel had become part of the museum.<sup>55</sup> But now the issues began to emerge of how to depict the hostel. Some men in Lwandle were arguing that it should only represent their lives, as the hostels were only for male migrant workers. A counter-argument was that many women had, especially during the late 1970s and 1980s, lived in the hostels, defying the regulations and often being arrested. On Saturday 18 August 2007, a group of women formally opened the doors to Hostel 33 and re-enacted elements of their lives from those times [fig. 15]. Afterwards, they returned to the community hall and, with the assistance of photographs from their younger years, told stories of when they had lived the hostels. It was a day of recollections, remembrances and celebration and it seemed to signal that a museum community was being firmly established in Lwandle [fig. 16].

But, at the risk of sounding too pessimistic, I do not want to end on this celebratory note. I rather want to signal that instead of seeing this moment described above as the end of a process it is more effective to mark it as part of the continuing struggles over museum community. Earlier on I referred to how the City of Cape Town drew up plans to upgrade the museum building and to landscape the environment in 2005. There were a series of meetings held with the museum staff, some community members and members of the board of the museum as these proposals were vigorously discussed and contested. It was as a result of these discussions that instead of turning the museum’s surrounds into an Eastern Cape landscape, as the planners envisaged, the development brought together institutions of civil society in Lwandle, combining the museum with a hardly used municipal office and the nearby Hector Peterson Library. Noëleen Murray, an architect and museum board member, who was deeply involved in this re-design of the urban landscape, celebrated these achievements in an article she wrote in *Architecture South Africa* in April 2007. The museum, she wrote, had played a ‘proactive role’, by suggesting that the fencing between the institutions be removed and a public precinct be created.<sup>56</sup> Yet at the moment these words appeared, unbeknownst to her and the museum staff, the library adjacent to the museum was planning to put up a fence to secure its property. Despite vigorous objections from the museum, the fence went up. As Lunga Smile, the museum manager, wrote this is ‘the case of the R150,000 fence separating Hector Peterson Library from the Lwandle Migrant Museum’.<sup>57</sup>

## The Dilemmas of Changing History in Museums

What then is the dilemma? I would argue that it is not so much a question of how to claim and assert history as a craft. Similarly, the issue is not how to recover more hidden

histories. Instead, the challenge of South African historians, as myself, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool asserted at the conference, 'Telling Stories: Secrecy, Lies and History' held at the University of the Western Cape in 1999, is whether and how South African historians can broaden the concept of historiography from the limited confines of the academy, visualize their work in the public domain, and make visible and visual the productions of history.<sup>58</sup> But making such a leap is not that simple. As Mgijima and Buthelezi, both former curators of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, have shown in their account of a history of the museum, 'nothing can be taken for granted, from the physical premises in which to operate and funds to mount exhibitions, to relations with the local community and visitors'.<sup>59</sup> But it is not simply in establishing a museum or an historical narrative of its emergence where the difficulties are encountered. All histories are, after all, unpredictable and never simple. The challenges are in the spaces where one acts both as an academically trained historian and as an active member of the museum community. This is what Murray calls the 'messy in-between space' where one has to negotiate 'difficult histories' where different and competing narratives, claims and priorities constantly come up against each other.<sup>60</sup> It is in what Kratz and Karp call the 'museums frictions', where 'disparate communities, interests, goals and perspectives ... produce debates, tensions, collaborations, [and] conflicts of many sorts', that the public historian may be found.<sup>61</sup> And, of course, where such transactions occur there is bound to be insecurity. But taking refuge in the safety of one's knowledge and frameworks as many historians are doing, claiming there is now a crisis in history, and then harking back, with longing and some sense of desperation, to the issues and debates of the 1970s and 80s when South African history was supposedly flourishing, can only lead to stagnation. It is always in the tensions of insecurity and uncertainty that new and exciting knowledges are produced. As an historian one is always loath to make predictions, but it may be that it is in the public historian, who has to constantly negotiate and mediate between histories across a range of disparate domains and interests, that one can begin to visualize a future for the many, varied and different pasts.

## Notes

- 1 Barbra Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, presentation at CSPS Institutions of Public Culture Workshop, Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, 2001.
- 2 The most extensive statement of this position is the edited collection of essays that emerged from a workshop held at the Centre of African Studies at the University of Copenhagen, under the auspices of the Nordic Africa Institute. See Hans Erik Stolten (ed), *History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007); see also Cynthia Kros and Christopher Saunders, 'Conversations with Historians', *South African Historical Journal*, 51 (2004), 1-23.
- 3 This is the sub-title of a collection of essays that originally appeared in the *Radical History Review* 46/7 (February 1990) that reflected on different aspects of the radical and social histories of the 1980s and was re-published as a book a year later. Joshua Brown, Patrick Manning, Karin Shapiro, Jon Wiener, Belinda Bozzol, Peter Delius (eds), *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).
- 4 See Andre Odendaal, 'Developments in Popular History in the Western Cape in the 1980s', in Joshua Brown et al, *History from South Africa*, 362-367; Luli Callinicos, 'Popular History in the Eighties' in J Brown et al, *History from South Africa*, 258-267; Leslie Witz, 'The Write Your Own History Project', in J Brown et al, *History from South Africa*, 369-378; David Anthony, 'South African People's History' in J Brown et al, *History from South Africa*, 278-286.
- 5 Colin Bundy, 'An Image of Its Own Past? Towards a Comparison of American and South African Historiography'. In Brown et al *History from South Africa*, 102.
- 6 Norman Etherington, 'Post-Mo and SA History', *Southern African Review of Books*, vol 44, 1996, 10.
- 7 Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Who Speaks for South African Pasts?', *Telling Stories: Secrecy, Lies and History*, South African Historical Society Conference, University of Western Cape, 11-14 July 1999, 1.
- 8 For an account of how public history took root in the USA see Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006). For the idea of shared authority see Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York, 1990).
- 9 Center for the Study of Public Scholarship, 'Institutions of Public Culture Fellowships, 2005-6', poster/brochure (Cape Town and Atlanta: Steering Committee, Institutions of Public Culture, 2005).
- 10 Ciraj Rassool, 'Community Museums, Memory Politics, and Social Transformation in South Africa: Histories, Possibilities and Limits', in Ivan Karp, Corinne A Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, with Gustavo Buntinx, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Ciraj Rassool, *Museum Frictions: Global Transformations/ Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 307.
- 11 Colin Bundy, 'New Nation, New History: Constructing the Past in Post-Apartheid South Africa', citing Heribert Adam. In Stolten (ed), *History Making*, 78. The quotation was not in isiXhosa but I decided to translate it in order to be consistent with the museum's exhibitionary practices of presenting all its texts in English and isiXhosa.
- 12 Nigel Worden, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town: The Making of a City* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998), 250.
- 13 Rassool, 'Community Museums', 288.
- 14 Rassool, 'Community Museums', 290.
- 15 Stolten, 'History in the New South Africa', 29. See also Etherington, 'Po-mo and SA History' for an earlier statement of this position..
- 16 Bundy, 'New Nation', 79.
- 17 Witz, Minkley and Rassool, 'Who Speaks', 25.
- 18 Bundy, 'New Nation', 79.
- 19 Christopher Saunders, 'Four Decades of South African Academic Historical Writing: A Personal Perspective'. In Stolten (ed), *History Making*, 288.
- 20 C Rassool, 'The Individual, Biography and Resistance in South African Public History', *South African and Contemporary History Seminar*, University of the Western Cape, 7 October 1997, 23.
- 21 Rassool, 'The Individual', 23.
- 22 Rassool, 'The Individual', 36.
- 23 Rassool, 'The Individual', 23.
- 24 Noel Solani and Khwezi ka Mpumlwana, 'Memory, Identity and Representation: Possibilities of New Models of Representation in a Transforming Environment', *South African Museums Association Bulletin*,

- 25, 2 (2001), 86.
- 25 Ciraj Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa', PhD thesis, UWC, 2005, 269-70.
- 26 Noor Nieftagodien, cited in Christopher Saunders and Cynthia Kros, 'Conversations with Historians', *South African Historical Journal* 51 (2004), 1.
- 27 Paul Maylam, cited in Christopher Saunders and Cynthia Kros, 'Conversations', 5.
- 28 Kerry Ward and Nigel Worden, 'Commemorating, Suppressing and Invoking Cape slavery', in S. Nuttall and C Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- 29 Carohn Cornell, 'Whatever Became of Cape Slavery in Western Cape Museums', *Kronos* 25 (1998/99).
- 30 Patric Tariq Mellet, 'Biography of Patric Tariq Mellet', *South African History Online*, [www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/bios/mellet.pt.html](http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/bios/mellet.pt.html), accessed 29 October 2008.
- 31 See, for example, Luli Callinicos, *Gold and Workers, 1886-1924: A People's History of South Africa*, vol 1 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981); Luli Callinicos, *Working Life, 1886-1940: Factories, Townships and Popular Culture on the Rand: A People's History of South Africa*, vol 2 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); Luli Callinicos, *A Place in the City: The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid: A People's History of South Africa*, vol 3 (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Ravan Press and Maskew Millar Longman, 1993).
- 32 Leslie Witz and Ciraj Rassool, 'The Dog, the Rabbit and the Reluctant Historians', *South African Historical Journal*, 27 (1992), 242.
- 33 D Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London: Viking, 1997).
- 34 Jane Carruthers, 'Heritage and History', *H-Africa, Africa Forum* 2, 20 October 1998.
- 35 Nicky Rousseau, 'Popular History in South Africa in the 1980s: The Politics of Production', MA thesis, University of the Western Cape (1994), 30. See also Saul Dubow, 'Thoughts on South Africa: Some Preliminary Ideas', in Stolten, *History Making*, 51-2
- 36 Jeff Guy, 'Battling with Banality', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 18 (1998), 157; see also Christopher Saunders, 'The Transformation of Heritage in the New South Africa', in H Erik Stolten (ed), *History Making*, 183-195, for a similar view.
- 37 Martin Legassick, 'Reflections on Practising Applied History in South Africa, 1994-2002: From Skeletons to Schools', in H Erik Stolten (ed), *History Making*, 129-147.
- 38 See Noëleen Murray, Nick Shepherd and Martin Hall (eds), *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-Apartheid City* (London: Routledge, 2007).
- 39 J McGregor and L Schumaker. 'Heritage in Southern Africa: Imagining and Marketing Public Culture and History', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 4 (2006), 665.
- 40 Henrietta Lidchi, 'The Poetics and Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures', in Stuart Hall (ed), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 160
- 41 David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 23.
- 42 Nsizwa Dlamini, 'The Battle of Ncome Project: State Memorialisation, Discomforting Spaces', *Southern African Humanities*, 13 (2001), 125-138.
- 43 Premesh Lalu, 'In the Event of History: On the Post-colonial Critique of Apartheid', paper presented at the CSPS / African Studies Seminar, Emory University, 15 February 2007.
- 44 Nico van Gijsen, 'Wit span', Rapport 31 January 1988.
- 45 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London and Harmondsworth: BBC and Penguin Books, 1973), 151-2.
- 46 I borrow, rather liberally, the term from the title of Premesh Lalu's book, *The Deaths of Hintsa*. Lalu argues for the 'event of history' as generated in the writing of history and not simply that which happened. It is the 'formation, regulation and transformation of historical statements'.
- 47 Berna Maree, 'A Spectacle of Colour', *South African Panorama*, 33, 6 (June 1988), 4.
- 48 Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, 'Transformation of the Bartolomeu Dias Museum Research Brief', August 2007.
- 49 'Transformation of the Bartolomeu Dias Museum Research Brief'.
- 50 Minutes of Board Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, 29 January 2007.
- 51 Bongani Mgijima and Vusi Buthelezi, 'Mapping Museum-Community Relations in Lwandle', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 4 (December 2006), 796.

- 52 Mgijima and Buthelezi, 'Mapping Museum', 800.
- 53 Mgijima and Buthelezi, 'Mapping Museum', 805.
- 54 Noëleen Murray, 'Working with Inconsistencies and Discontinuities: Competing Conceptions of Heritage and Urban Design at the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum', *Architecture South Africa* (March/April 2007), 32.
- 55 Email from Lunga Smile to Leslie Witz and Noëleen Murray, 12 June 2007.
- 56 Murray, 'Working with Inconsistencies', 32.
- 57 Email from Lunga Smile to Leslie Witz and Noëleen Murray, 12 June 2007.
- 58 Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, 'Who Speaks for South African Pasts?', paper presented at 'Telling Stories: Secrecy, Lies and History' conference, University of Western Cape, 11-14 July 1999, 27.
- 59 Mgijima and Buthelezi, 'Mapping Museum', 806.
- 60 Murray, 'Working with Inconsistencies', 32
- 61 Corinne Kratz and Ivan Karp, 'Introduction: Museum Frictions: Public Cultures / Global Transformations'. In I Karp, C.A. Kratz, L Szwaja and T Ybarra-Frausto, with G Buntinx, B Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and C Rassool (eds), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures / Global Transformations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.



Figure 1. McGregor Museum, Kimberley. Photo: Gary Minkley.



Figure 2. Renovation notice, McGregor Museum. Photo: Gary Minkley.



Figure 3. Coelacanth, East London Museum. Photo: Leslie Witz.



Figure 4. Call for participation, East London Museum. Photo: Leslie Witz.

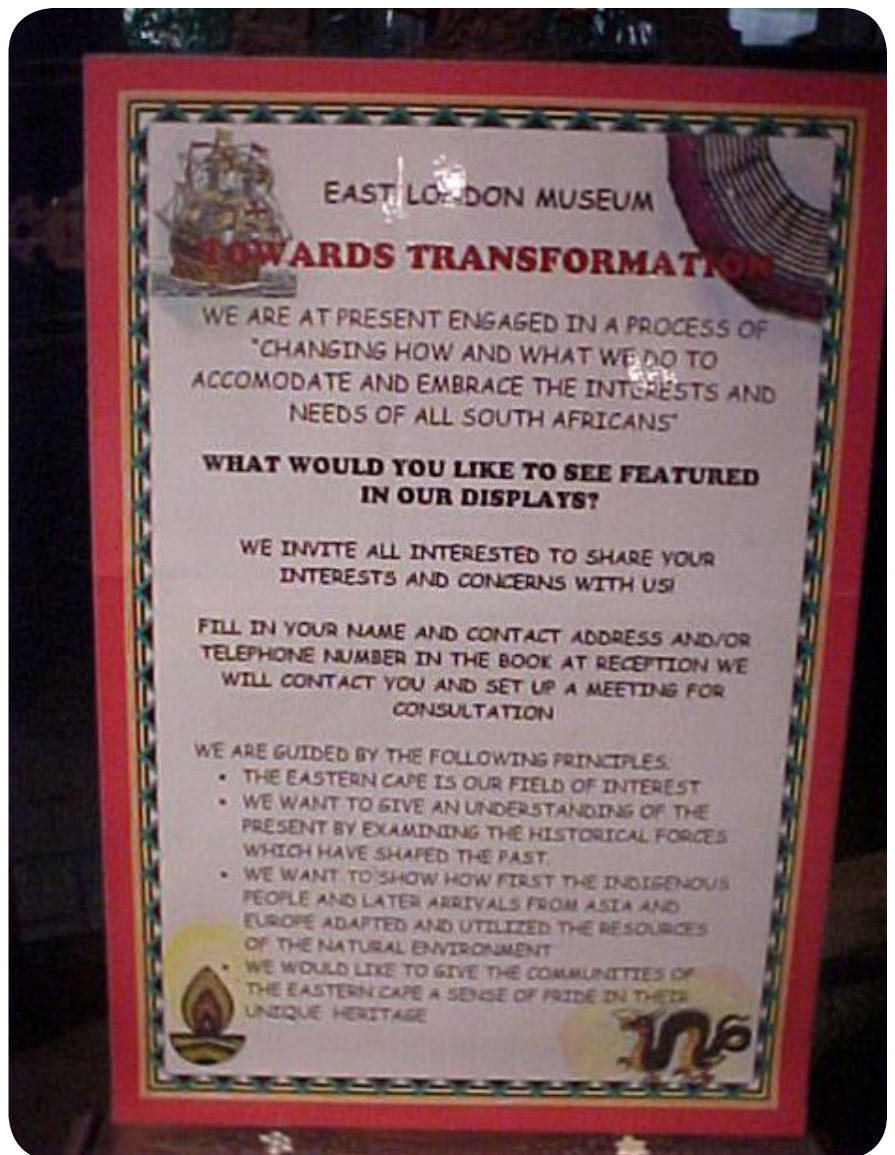


Figure 5. Exhibition of settler frontier, Albany Museum, Grahamstown. Photo: Premesh Lalu.



Figure 6. Notice of closure of the diorama, IZIKO South African Museum. Photo: Wendelin Schnippenkoetter.



Figure 7. African Cultures Gallery, IZIKO South African Museum. Photo: Leslie Witz.



Figure 8. Dilemma label attached to Stories of Home exhibit, Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. Photo: Leslie Witz.





Figure 9. Memory cloth and dilemma label, District Six Museum. Photo: Leslie Witz.



Figure 10. Dilemma label in Cell Stories, Robben Island Museum. Photo: Leslie Witz.



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Figure 11. Reconstructed caravel commemorating the voyage of Bartolomeu Dias, Dias Museum complex, Mossel Bay. Photo: Leslie Witz.



Figure 12. Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. Photo: Leslie Witz.



Figure 13. The first exhibition in the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, 1999/2000. Photo: Leslie Witz.



Figure 14. Stories of Home exhibit, Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. Invitation to opening designed by Jos Thorne.



You are cordially invited to the  
Official Opening  
of the first Permanent Exhibition  
presented by

### The Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum

On Saturday, 15 October 2005  
10:00 for 10:30

Guest Speakers

**Nomaindia Mfeketo**  
Mayor of Cape Town

and

**Bongani Mngijima**  
Deputy Director Museums and Heritage Resource Services  
North West Provincial Government; first curator of Lwandle

RSVP by 30 September, please, to assist catering:



**Direct route:**  
On the N2, drive past Somerset West and turn  
right off the R2 onto LWANDLE (signposted).

At the 1st circle turn left and at the  
2nd circle go right.

Follow the road until you see the main gate  
opposite the taxi rank (signposted).

You will be directed to a parking area  
by a parking attendant (very helpful).





Figure 15. Opening of Hostel 33 by former women residents, Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. Photo: Leslie Witz.



Figure 16. Telling stories of life in the hostels, Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. Photo: Leslie Witz.

