How history becomes heritage

Milestones in the national heritage programme

The power of heritage to the people

Interview with Sonwabile Mancotywa

New poetry by Keorapetse Kgotsitsile, Barbara Schreiner and Frank Meintjies

The Work of Art in a Changing Light: focus on Pitika Ntuli

Exclusive book excerpt from Robert Sobukwe, in a class of his own by Thami ka Plaatjie
editorial

Welcome to the Artivist. An artist according to Wikipedia is a portmanteau word combining “art” and “activist”.

In It’s Bigger Than Hip Hop by M.K. Asante. Jr Asante writes that the artist “merges commitment to freedom and justice with the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body and the imagination. The artist knows that to make an observation is to have an obligation.”

In the South African context this also means that we cannot merely report on ‘news’ as if we were guardians of a latter-day Stakhanovite movement and want to project Taylorist efficiencies.

Instead we need to reflect and analyse with the all-embracing view as to what we have done and what is still to be done. We need to share with associated institutions and the public developments in terms of transformation of the arts and a new cultural landscape for South Africa, as well as being reflective of our progress, putting debates on the table, allowing for healthy engagement and learning from the past.

At the same time, there is a need for a strong activism in promoting a thriving arts economy in which the arts, artists and arts education flourish. We need to create space for real debates where we look at the parameters in which we operate and point the way to a freer future where all our dreams can be fulfilled. We also need to promote the Constitutional imperative of free speech and creativity within stated considerations.

With this in mind, this first publication looks back at projects that fell under the year 2012 which we coined the “Year of Heritage”. At the same time, it is not enough to parade the work done. Rather we wish to share the ideas and ideals that go into the making of heritage, the building of monuments, the construction of museums, the cultural imaginary that goes into thinking through cultural sites, artefacts, texts and scripts that attempt to write a different narrative of South African history.

As Thami ka Plaatjie says about the project of writing history: “We represent their [the people’s] voices, their anguish….. We are appointed by fate to tell their stories.”

Answering the call to ARTivist, from the back from left to right: Siphiwo Mahala, Lisa Combrinck, Premi Appalraju, Sandile Memela

Photography of AFCON 2013 by VWV

Other photographs by James Mathibeng, Josias Pila, Mphokuzi Ncumza, Madimetja Malela, Victor Dlamini, Alta Griffiths and Chris Kirchoff

Cover: Ayanda Nhlayo with boy puppet at the opening of AFCON 2013

Vusithemba Ndima
He lectured at UNISA and joined DACST in 1997. He soon rose to Chief Director of Heritage. He was appointed DDG of Heritage and Archives in 2013 at DAC (Department of Arts and Culture).

Adv. Sonwabile Mancotywa
He studied Law at the University of Transkei and was a student activist, became the youngest MEC in Arts and Culture. He was appointed the first CEO of the National Heritage Council.

Thami Ka Plaatjie
He is a political activist and leader, an academic, a historian and a writer. He is a former history lecturer and registrar at Vista University. He was deputy chairperson of the SABC Board. He heads the Pan African Foundation.

Barbara Schreiner
She is an experienced senior manager and consultant with considerable expertise in research, policy and strategy. She has written extensively on issues of water, gender and poverty; and has been writing poetry for many years.

Premi Appalraju
She spent many years in exile working in different countries. Also an artist, writer of documents, speeches and some creative pieces. Has worked on gender issues over the years. Now a communicator in the DAC.

Prof. Keorapetse Kgositile
He was in exile for over thirty years, published many volumes of poetry, taught at many Universities across the world, played an active role in the ANC, appointed National Poet Laureate, is a Ministerial Advisor.

Frank Meintjes
He has worked in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Meintjes is co-founder of Isandla, geared to enhancing innovation in development. He works for The Centre of Memory, a Nelson Mandela Foundation initiative.

Pitika Ntuli
He was educated in South Africa, Swaziland, the US and the UK. He is a poet, writer, sculptor, academic and expert in indigenous culture. He has exhibited internationally and his works are in important public and private collections around the world.

Sandile Memela
He is a journalist, author, thought-leader, blogger, cultural critic and civil servant. He is Chief Director for Social Cohesion at the DAC.

Siphiwo Mahala
He is the author of the award winning novel, When a Man Cries, which he translated into isiXhosa as Yakhal' Indoda. His short story collection, African Delights, was published by Jacana Media in 2011. He is the Head of Books and Publishing at the DAC.

Lisa Combrinck
She has worked as a lecturer at Vista University, a speechwriter for the Presidency, a media liaison officer, a books editor and a research director. She is a published poet and currently heads Communications in the DAC.
I am delighted to welcome this publication into our midst. I wish ARTivist a successful run in the sector. It will provide an exciting platform for artists and activists as well as government and researchers to debate issues in this field. I look forward to this magazine.

That the first issue focuses on “Heritage” is a timely intervention as we declared 2012 as the year of heritage. It is important to look back at our achievements with the view to consolidating and improving all areas of our work.

During 2012 we focused on preserving and promoting our country’s cultural heritage with particular emphasis on our liberation heritage. This we did as part of honouring the heroes and heroines of our struggle for national liberation and to use heritage as a catalyst for local economic development and job creation.

The work we did on heritage promotion was in addition to initiatives we have undertaken under our Mzansi Golden Economy (MGE) Strategy to position the arts, culture and heritage sector as one key contributor to the economy and to job creation.

We are proud to announce that last year we held a successful National Summit on Social Cohesion which has emerged with a clear plan of action that will be implemented by government working together with the rest of society. In the implementation of our programme we will work with our Social Cohesion Advocates; imminent South Africans drawn from a variety of sectors within our society.

We expect to move with greater speed in the implementation of the MGE during this year, 2013; a year we are dedicating to strengthening the cultural and creative industries in our country.

As a Department we have declared 2013 as the year of the Mzansi Golden Economy! Together let us continue to work towards boosting the economic development of the arts and building a better life for all.

Minister Paul Mashatile with Topthorn, one of the life-like horse puppets from the Broadway production of War Horse, designed and manufactured by the Handspring Puppet Company.
Artivist looks at key heritage projects in 2012
Text by Premi Appalraju

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H
eritage is the story of being human. It demonstrates the intriguing, colourful, diverse and sometimes horrifying ways in which we have shaped our history and heritage.

Minister of Arts and Culture Paul Mashatile emphasises that we need to learn from this because it reveals to us how we came to be who we are and where we are heading. We need to be highly conscious of this because we become the heritage that we create for ourselves.

For South Africa today, heritage is a complex, difficult journey towards a unified new nation through a process of education, creativity and hard work. Heightening the awareness of this and emphasising the role of art, culture and heritage to create a new individual and national psyche is the domain of the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC). Its many different heritage projects in 2012 are testimony to the journey.

Education, creativity and hard work was the philosophy of the founder and first President of the African National Congress, Dr John Langalibalele Dube who was every bit the ‘new South African’. A writer, philosopher, educator, preacher and politician, he believed in education and equality for both men and women, and founded the Inanda Seminary Institute for Girls. He also started the first Zulu/English newspaper, ‘Langa lase Natali’.

In his honour the JL Dube Legacy Project is being developed. It includes the restoration and transformation of his house in KwaZulu-Natal into an interpretive centre, the creation of an exhibition that illustrates his exceptional contribution to society and the construction of a ‘Tower of Hope’.

A human tower of hope was the founder of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa, Steven Bantu Biko. Like Dube he was an original thinker, an outstanding intellect and a struggle icon. In his honour the Steve Biko Heritage Centre at his hometown of Ginsberg near King William’s Town in the Eastern Cape was opened in November 2012.

It is one of several community assets and catalysts for tourism and sustainable socio-economic development that the DAC launched across South Africa in 2012, and includes a museum, archive and library resource centre, commemorative garden, training rooms, conference centre, cultural performance and production spaces, a community media centre and retail spaces.

Both Dube and Biko understood the far-reaching impact of heritage on the social, psychological and economic wellbeing of South Africans. Both men looked to a united future, forged from a divided past.

2012 marked the centenaries of a number of significant historical events in South Africa, including the establishment of:
• The oldest liberation movement in Africa, the African National Congress (ANC)
• Johannesburg’s historic Alexandra Township
• The Voortrekker/Msunduzi Museum in Pietermaritzburg

All three have significantly formed South Africa’s identity in diverse ways. In commemorating these and other milestones the DAC aims to preserve the memory of watershed historical epochs, for these are the trigger points of a new national identity.

Essential to this new identity is to celebrate the often forgotten or unknown heroes who paved the way for freedom and democracy in South Africa. As part of this, buildings, streets and institutions have been renamed across the land.

Moving beyond national borders, the DAC extends its culture and heritage hand to other parts of Africa through activities to reaffirm the collective liberation heritage on the continent South Africans call home.

The DAC’s Matola Raid Memorial in southern Mozambique pays tribute to the ANC cadres and Mozambicans who died in 1981 in Matola as a result of a cross-border raid. This memorial and interpretive centre acknowledges the support that Mozambique gave to South Africa during the liberation struggle and symbolises the friendship between the two countries.

A strong sense of home and a spirit of inclusiveness informs the DAC’s work, poignantly illustrated by the return in 2012 of the remains of a Khoisan couple, Klaas and Trooi Pienaar, to South Africa their ancestral land. Their remains had been removed from their graves by Austrian anthropologist Dr Rudolf Pöch in
September 1909 and sent to Vienna for ‘scientific analysis’.

Facilitated by the DAC, the Northern Cape Government and the Austrian government, the Pienaars were brought home and given a dignified reburial on 12 August in Kuruman, Northern Cape, attended by the community, President Jacob Zuma, DAC Minister Paul Mashatile and Northern Cape Premier Hazel Jenkins. President Zuma stressed the importance of restoring dignity to the Khoi and San communities in his speech. This contributes to the process of national healing and unity, as does //hapo ‘The Dream’ at Freedom Park outside of Pretoria, an ultra-modern memorial to democracy founded on the values of human dignity, rights and freedom.

In 1999 Dr Nelson Mandela said, ‘...the day should not be far off, when we shall have a people’s shrine, a Freedom Park, where we shall honour with all the dignity they deserve, those who endured pain so we should experience the joy of freedom’.

That day has arrived and Freedom Park was born as a national and international icon of humanity and freedom. It symbolises the universal connectedness between all South Africans irrespective of their backgrounds. This is expressed through the seven epochs represented at Freedom Park where the story of Southern Africa, dating from 3.6 billion years ago to the present, unfolds in narrative and visual form.

The name //hapo or ‘dream’ is from a Khoi proverb ‘//hapo ge //hapo tama /haahasib dis tama ka i bo’ that means ‘A dream is not a dream until it is shared by the entire community’.

This is the dream of the DAC – for South African culture and heritage to be shared by the entire South African community. The DAC’s projects in 2012 offer a strong sense of this, as you will see from the selection described below.

**OR Tambo Legacy Project**

Celebrated longstanding ANC President Oliver Reginald Tambo, who spent over 30 years in exile until 1991, was born in the village of Nkantolo in Bizana, Eastern Cape on 27 October 1917. An academic who loved music and sport he took over as the ANC head after Chief Albert Luthuli death in a tragic railway accident in July 1967.

To honour his immeasurable contribution to the liberation struggle, democracy, education and leadership in South Africa, the DAC restored and upgraded the OR Tambo family homestead in Nkantolo, including: erecting a statue of him; upgrading security; developing a traditional values kraal; an interpretive centre; offices; a tea garden; craft centre and a Youth Leadership School of Innovation. This project is part of a broader legacy route the DAC is spearheading.

**Ncome Museum and Blood River Heritage Site**

The Ncome-Blood River Heritage Site in the Nquthu/Dundee area, KwaZulu-Natal, offers alternative interpretations of the legendary battle that took place between the Voortrekkers and the Zulus on 16 December 1838.

Architecturally, the Ncome Museum is unique, taking its shape from the Zulu war horn formation initiated by the world-renowned Zulu King Shaka. The second phase of the Ncome Museum (established in 1999) has now been constructed, including a library, pottery and beadwork space, curio shop, tourist and staff accommodation facilities and an exhibition space.

The construction of a bridge linking the Ncome Museum and Blood River Monument symbolises reconciliation between South Africa’s diverse cultural groups.

**Renaming of Presidential buildings and airports**

Kings House, the President’s official residence in Durban, was renamed Dr JL Dube House in honour of the first President of the African National
Through these celebrations and cohesion, the DAC in partnership with other government departments, institutions and key strategic partners annually celebrates and commemorates historic national days to promote nation building and social cohesion. The DAC in partnership with other government departments, institutions and key strategic partners annually celebrates and commemorates historic national days to promote nation building and social cohesion. The DAC in partnership with other government departments, institutions and key strategic partners annually celebrates and commemorates historic national days to promote nation building and social cohesion.

Historic national days

The DAC in partnership with other government departments, institutions and key strategic partners annually celebrates and commemorates historic national days to promote nation building and social cohesion. Through these celebrations and commemorations as well as monuments and heritage sites in honour of liberation struggle stalwarts, we become closer to an understanding of what it means to be human and the striving for freedom and human rights in our present time. In this way, through heritage, we learn from the past and extend the ‘humanizing vocation’ of our technical experts, historians, leaders and our people.

Graves and homes upgraded and declared

Many of the graves of liberation stalwarts and heroes have been upgraded and declared, including those of Steve Biko, Robert Sobukwe, Bayers Naude, Helen Suzman and Abram Tiro. The homes of liberation leaders and outstanding South African artists including Olive Schreiner, Miriam Makeba and Ingrid Jonker are being restored and declared.

A poem by Barbara Schreiner

Xanadu revisited
(Sigiriya, Sri Lanka, 2012)

I stand in awe at the base of 400 foot cliffs
Surrounded by gardens now ancient and derelict
Where water still bubbles through carved stone fountains
Pushed up by complex hydraulic science
Trickled down granite channels
Meaning through lush grass and trees.
Lowered at the engineering
The vision
Two thousand years old
That built this pleasure garden.

Inch by inch I mount the steps
Up the cliff where painted women wait
200 feet above the ground
Displaying their pomegranate breasts
Painted lips
Fingertips of pleasure
East West Africa Asia
Women of the world gathered on your cliff face for your harem

Inch by inch I climb the modern metal stairs
That now allows us ascended
Up and up and up
Beyond the turtle gate
The massive carved claws
The ancient rock head gazing down
Gave eye lists upon our tourist awe.

Up and up I go
Until on top I find your pleasure dome
Built on the foundations of patricide
Sprawled in splendour across the top of this massif
Rock walls outlining the once palatial bedrooms
Boudoirs
Kitchens
Palace rooms
Toilets
Bathing pool carved into solid granite
360 degree view across the glorious green Sri Lankan forest
Once your land
And we as tourists gaze in awe at the remains of your vision
Your palace of complexity and indulgence
The sheer enormity of ego that drove this vision
I wonder as I stand at the highest point and gaze around
And around
I wonder
How many people died hauling stone
Hardwood trunks
Sacks of grain
Carcasses of deer
Up to this ludicrous vantage point
Painting on sheer cliff walls your naked women
Providing for your delight.
How many fathers left their children hungry
How many wives turned to empty beds night after night
How many bones lie tangled amongst the granite blocks?
How many people died hauling stone

And where are the monuments to those who died
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Writing a different narrative

ARTivist interviews Vusi Ndima, Deputy Director General in the Department of Arts and Culture

A: Heartiest congratulations on being appointed Deputy Director General. How long have you been with the Department?
VN: Thank you very much. I have been with the Department for 15 years and this is the 16th year.
A: Given the terrible history of 300 years, and more, of oppression and destruction of culture and heritage, have we made a dent at all?
VN: I would say yes, we have actually made a dent in a very significant way, given the fact that we are talking of over 300 years. I am sure you will agree that we are trying to overcome and rectify the problems of over 300 years, considering we are only in the 19th year of democracy, we can see that we have done well. If you look at the kind of policies and legislative framework we have put in place and the new institutions we have been able to establish, this is beginning to provide a different narrative of the history of this country. The research that is being done in the process, ensures that the history of the previously marginalised is being recovered. National Symbols, before 1994, were a reflection of the previous apartheid South African government. We have actually done some fundamental transformation in this particular area. We now have different National Symbols. Some of them named after our national stalwarts e.g. the Order of Companions of OR Tambo and the Order of Luthuli. Others have been named after some significant events of this country such as the Order of Mendi for Bravery.

The Order of Mendi is named after a significant tragedy that happened in 1917, where many of our people perished during the First World War. A lot has been achieved in this short period. Of course that does not mean that we can rest on our laurels, there is still a lot more work needed. For 19 years of existence, we have achieved much.

A: Some sections of the public have often alluded to the notion that the Heritage Unit has worked on the legacy of the heroes aligned to the ruling party, do you think this is the case?
VN: I do not agree with that statement. We have been working on the Legacy Programme of government, a government of all.
Of course there would be Legacy Projects that pay homage to the leaders and heroes of the ruling party just as there are Legacy Projects that have no association with the ruling party. The Steve Biko project, is an example of such a project. This project was unveiled recently by the President of South Africa. The Freedom Park project again does not represent a political party, but the entire country. Freedom Park provides a narrative of how far we have come as a country. Both the Sarah Bartmann and the Ncome Museum have no association with the ruling party either. Let us not only look at brick and mortar projects as Legacy Projects, consider the commemoration of the Anglo-Boer War. It had nothing to do with the ruling party, but involved citizens of this country: the ancestors of the English and the Afrikaans speaking citizens and of course the participation of the black people. The Liberation Heritage Route is an extremely important project we are engaged with. In fact the National Heritage Council has taken on this project boldly with the goal to working on it for the next few years. As you can see there are many Legacy Projects, not at all associated with the ruling party.

A: Some say that Heritage is all about preserving the past, how do we make it a living reality especially for the youth?

VN: I think that this is a very philosophical question. Of course the natural result of heritage is the reflection on the past, but what people fail to remember is that heritage is always in the process of still being produced. Even the current generations are in the process of producing heritage. Heritage is therefore about the past, present and the future. It would not be fair to say the heritage is only about the past. If you look at music, there’s the music of Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba. Both composed and performed popular music in the 1960’s. The current generation has turned around their music and future generations will again be building on this legacy to create their own musical heritage. There is always a continuum between the past, present and future.

A: What did you think of the South African cultural landscape in terms of Heritage when you joined the Department and how has this changed?

VN: I can tell you that there has been a significant improvement. When I joined Heritage in 2000, there wasn’t a Directorate before then, I was the first person to Head the
Directorate of Heritage. If you look at our institutions at that point in time they were headed by whites, who had been in those positions during the apartheid government and subscribed to the values held at that time. There were no black people running these institutions then, however today this has changed and most institutions are headed by blacks. For me this has been a major turnaround, a major shift that has taken place.

Of course transformation can not only be accounted for by the people that head the institutions, but also by the staff and output of the institutions. There has been a great deal of improvement in the quality of exhibitions and in what the institutions are capable of doing. New strategies are being implemented and most of the outreach programmes of these institutions involve communities and schools that visit our institutions to learn about the things that are actually housed in them: museums, history museums, cultural museums, natural history museums dealing with the sciences. There is a lot of groundwork that’s taking place. They also go out to communities, work with them and interact with them. Transformation has also taken place in terms of geographical names.

15 years ago there were still names that reflected colonialism in South Africa, whereas now there are names reflective of the communities of South Africa. In the area of legislation there has been considerable improvement, more policies have been formulated. For instance we did not have policies addressing a very important aspect, living heritage - what we call Intangible Heritage. Intangible Heritage deals with traditions, customs, indigenous music, indigenous knowledge systems. This policy is in place now and in addition to it we have done studies auditing the intangible cultural heritage of the nine provinces of this country which begins to enhance our understanding of the cultural heritage of a diverse population of our country. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done. I would say that since my appointment, there have been many changes. I have worked with teams of people, some still here, others have made their mark and left. They have all made a great difference.

A: There is talk that the Department and its institutions operate in silos? Do you think that there is any justification in this, if so how do we work towards a more unified approach?

VN: If this question had been asked two or three years ago I’d say yes. Now that the CEO Forum, chaired by the Director General, and the Chairpersons’ Forum, chaired by our Minister, meet with all the Chairpersons of the Boards of Institutions these meetings have closed the gap in a profound way. They allow us to focus on sharing our experiences and the work we do. We also look for opportunities of working together. Of course one can not say it is an ideal situation, but one can see that it is a great improvement from previous working conditions with perhaps little hiccups here and there.

A: The Department has been accused by some of abandoning a large part of the thrust contained in the White Paper on Arts and Culture, if this is the case, how far have we travelled?

VN: First and foremost we must just look at the White Paper as a policy document, a policy document that evolves over time. To answer your question there are a lot of things that have been implemented, some of them might not have been implemented in the way that the White Paper had suggested they be, but they have been implemented nevertheless. Heritage for instance: we have implemented the South African Heritage Association, the National Heritage Council and the South African Geographical Names Council. The way the White Paper had envisaged the structure was completely different. It has therefore been largely implemented. Of course, as you know, documents like this need to be reviewed to see what has been implemented and what could not be implemented. It is important also to establish the reason why certain things could not be implemented and how we can improve on the existing White Paper.

A: In terms of the regional projects we are close to the imminent launch of the Matola Memorial and Interpretive Centre, how do you view this?

VN: I am very excited about this project and these regional projects. They are there to cement the relationships between ourselves and the region. It would be sad if this particular government did not recognise the supreme sacrifice made by the region. This project acknowledges the supreme sacrifice made by the Mozambican government and people who hosted us during those difficult
times. The SANDF crossed the borders and attacked the ANC bases and in the process Mozambicans suffered and some of them were killed too. You would recall the history of Ruth First being killed by a parcel bomb. Our former Minister Pallo Jordan was injured and so was Judge Albie Sachs. These people are our stalwarts and the kind of suffering that they endured spoke of their courage, while being hosted by the Mozambicans. There is no way we can forget this part of our history. It is a project that should also allow us to deal with issues in South Africa. If you look at the 2007/8 incidents of sporadic xenophobic attacks against the people of this region. I think that this project should be shared with the South African public, the incidents of the period should be disseminated so that people would know why we are doing these projects and why we want to continue doing these projects in Lesotho, Angola and even in Tanzania. It is important that we acknowledge the contributions made by these countries to bring us to where we are today. Their role in the kind of Constitution that we have. It might not have been, had it not been for the kind of support that we received from other parts of the world. Really, I am very excited about the launch of the Matola Project and what it represents and the possibility of doing the same in other parts of the region once it is complete.

### The Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance

- The Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance in Hankey, Eastern Cape, commemorates and celebrates the life of Sarah Bartmann, and the history, heritage and culture of the Khoi-San peoples of South Africa.

- Sarah Bartmann was a KhoiKhoi woman who was taken from her home to 19th century England and France where she was exhibited as an example of the exotic nature of black women. When she eventually died in France, she suffered further humiliation even after death, when her remains were dissected, supposedly for the purposes of science.

- After long and high-level diplomatic consultations and a poem by Dianne Ferrus, hastened the process in the French Parliament and her remains were repatriated to South African in early May 2002 and interred in the Gamtoos Valley on 9 August 2002, on National Women’s Day. Sarah Bartmann is a national symbol for the struggle for human rights and racial equality, but also an international symbol of the historic struggle of all African and South African women, such as Helen Suzman, Charlotte Maxeke and Lilian Ngoyi.

- The Sarah Bartmann Centre of Remembrance will include a museum to house the Sarah Bartmann Exhibition and the Khoi-San Exhibition, the Great Place of Celebration, which itself includes the gravesite, story-telling pits and a symbolic garden. The development of the centre is based on the concepts of memory, healing, and celebration. The development of the centre will bring in much needed employment to this impoverished community and the development of rural tourism.
WOUNDED DREAMS

By Keorapetse Kgositsile

Amongst the silences of restless nights
My voice wants to break through the shell of words
to name and sing the evidence
of our resolve and will to live
past the glib claims of noble intentions

If you have never walked through
the restless shadows of wounded dreams
beware; the young ones of tomorrow
might curse you by not wanting to remember
anything about your ways because everything
about you leaves a bitter taste in the mouth

Amongst the silences of these restless nights
our dreams refuse the perfumed bandages
that try to hide the depth of their wounds
Our voice yearns for the precision to name
what we are most responsive to
the way our lady of the mutton vindaloo
of my demand said: Listen here,
Shorty, this is hell's kitchen
you'll walk out of here tall you hear

Though the present remains
a dangerous place to live
cynicism would be a reckless luxury
toxic lies piled high and deodorized
to sound like the most clear signage
showing us the way forward from here

WOUNDED DREAMS

By Keorapetse Kgositsile

Not that I am dotard enough
to think it could ever be easy
or without pain to do anything
of value. But when I am surrounded
by the din of publicly proclaimed multiple
promises
I wonder if we can say with determined resolve
like Fidel: Never again will pain return
to the hearts of mothers nor shame to
the souls of all honest South Africans

Though the present is
a dangerous place to live
possibility remains what moves us
we are all involved
indifference would simply be
evidence of the will to die
or trying to straddle some fence
that no one has ever seen
together we can and must
rehabilitate our wounded dreams
to reclaim and nourish the song
of the quality of our vibrant being
as evidence of how it is to be alive
past any need for even a single lie

Out of the silences
of these restless nights
my voice wants to break
through the shell of words
and fly to the rooftops
to shout: when we have walked through
the restless shadows of wounded dreams
and come back from tomorrow together
we shall know each other
by the root and texture of our appetite

FOR HU XIANCHENG

By Keorapetse Kgositsile

Our sister of the determined passion
and clear vision taught us that it is
better to die on your feet
than live forever on your knees

And now my brother’s eye
sears through the squares
and rectangles that shape
and order our lives. From birth
certificate to death certificate and the grave
we are squared in and squared away

Someone please tell me where
our circles and cycles of life
went. Are we now doubled
or are we pathetic duplicates of others?

Or have our deities left home forever?

LETTER FROM HAVANA
(for Baby K)

By Keorapetse Kgositsile

A while back I said
with my little hand upon
the tapestry of memory and my loin
leaning on the blues to find voice:
If loving you is wrong
I do not want to do right

Now though I do not possess
A thousand thundering voices
like Mazisi kaMdhabu weKunene
nor Chris Abani’s mischievous courage
as I trace the shape of desire and longing
I wish I was a cartographer of dreams
but what I end up with is this stubborn question:
Should I love my heart more
because every time I miss you
that is where I find you
In January 2013, internationally renowned sculptor, poet and cultural activist, Pitika Ntuli unveiled a monument in Soweto in honour of freedom fighters who had lost their lives in the struggle. Through a discussion with Pitika Ntuli, ARTivist looks at the possible meanings and interpretation of this artwork.

In the heart of apartheid South Africa, all acts of courage against oppression have yet to be captured. SA History online tells us the story of those who came to be known as the ‘Silverton Three’. On the 25 January 1980 three MK Cadres, Stephen Mafoko, Humphrey Makhubo and Wilfred Madela, were allegedly on their way to carry out a planned MK sabotage mission on petrol depots at Watloo near Mamelodi, Pretoria. On the way ‘the Trio’ realised they were being tailed by the police. The story goes that ‘in an attempt to escape, they took refuge in a branch of Volkskas Bank in Silverton, Pretoria. They held 25 civilians in the bank hostage, making a number of demands, including a meeting with then State President Vorster, the release of Nelson Mandela and a man called Mange, as well as R1 000 000 in cash and an aircraft to fly them to Maputo.” During the negotiations between them and the police, food was supplied to the cadres and hostages. Thereafter a police unit stormed the bank and all three men were killed by the police. Two civilians, Valerie Anderson and Anna de Klerk, were killed and many others were wounded in the shootout.

The interviews and statements from some of those in this dramatic event, revealed the inner anguish and discipline of the freedom fighters. They also tell a story of courage, self-sacrifice, and the power of the human spirit to be free. It captures the conflicting emotions, thoughts and prayers of all those involved in the event – the Silverton Three and the twenty-five hostages including the two women who lost their lives as they were unwittingly caught in the drama - as well as the poignancy of the moment and the vulnerability and courage of the three young men.

Pitika Ntuli has created a six metre tall monument for the Silverton Trio which aims to capture the significance of a siege in which three young freedom fighters lost their lives, leaving behind a legacy of having reignited the hope of the oppressed masses of South Africa. Ntuli sees his work as an ‘anti-monument’ or a counter monument because the ever-changing shadows cast by the solid form tell their own story. Depending on the time of day, they confirm or contradict the physical structure. For example in the morning the machine gun through the shadow it casts becomes a helicopter, while chains become tears. Thus the making of meaning is subverted and shown to be constantly in flux as if we are meant to view works of art in an ever-changing and new light. In this way an object of art itself represents the potential power of a revolution.

Ntuli created the monument from scrap material, including scrap from the army. He sourced this material because the three were on an Umkhonto we Sizwe mission at the time of their death. Ntuli carved directly onto the metal giving it an added visual element. He has engraved into the monument Adinkra and Dogon symbols of reconciliation, bravery, fearlessness and humility. A head with three faces represents the three freedom fighters. This is topped with a feather like the one worn by Shaka Zulu on which perches a dove of peace. There are broken chains in the shape of a map of South Africa.

The lower section of the monument is an upturned skip that has been transformed into a prison with faces peering from the dark through the bars of a cell. At one end of the skip chains are forged to create a question mark, posing the question to the viewer of what the future holds.

The triangle of land surrounding the monument has been planted with 25 trees in memory of the 25 hostages and three benches have been placed in close proximity, each one dedicated to one of the Silverton Three.

In a period in which South Africa has honoured the legacy of those leaders who fought for freedom, this ‘counter monument’ is a timely tribute to the Silverton Three and their families, as well as those hostages killed and maimed.
The power of heritage to the people

ARTivist speaks to Adv. Sonwabile Mancotywa, CEO of the National Heritage Council

A: How long have you been with the National Heritage Council? Have you managed to transcend your roles?

SM: I studied Law at the University of Transkei. I was a political activist as a student. I was a founder member in 1985 of what was called Unitra Cultural Society – Uculso. I have a keen interest in culture. I did this as culture has a unique way of mobilising people and we used this to mobilise people. We believed that Transkei was one of the most repressive of all the Bantustans then, it had draconian laws. Most organisations were banned, even though they did not exist. The United Democratic Front was banned even though it was not yet in the Transkei! It was at the time when the ANC, PAC and other organisations were banned in South Africa, at the height of the curfew. It was then that Matanzima announced the banning of all the organisations. He did this from the Bhuna Building in Bhisho. The Bhuna has this history of contradictions, whilst now it houses former President’s (Mandela’s) heritage projects; the Transkei government occupied the building earlier. When Kaizer Matanzima banned these organisations he mentioned that even those yet to be set up with similar objectives are banned, meaning he was banning future possible organisations! This is the place that had a heavy underground network. Unitra had an underground organisation so strong most of the armed interventions were carried out by skilled commanders near Mthatha at that time. Most of them are dead like Mazizi Maqabeza. He worked with Chris Hani when he was confined in the Transkei for two years. These are all the people who influenced me. That’s why the University of Transkei became the hub of political activity! It was the nucleus actually, hence it was the target.

These were the things that influenced me, the banning of the SRC and the killing of the student leader SRC President, Matanda Mdondo. He was the cousin of Judge Dumisa Ntsebeza from a place called Cala. This is the place where Gwede Mantashe, Ayanda Ntsaluba (previous DG of DIRCO), Lindiwe Ndlala (previous DG of Local Government) comes from. It is a very historical town. Ayanda Ntsaluba left the country in 1986, he was a medical intern then, together with Dr Zola Dabula, a general, who is the doctor heading Mandela’s
medical team. This is interesting as it takes us back to the legacy of the leader I was talking about, Mazizi Maqabeza the commander in Transkei. He was actually the main leader under who Ntsaluba and Dabula worked. They were all part of the network.

I became part of that network. There’s even a project here in the Heritage Council, not because I come from that area, called Transkei Liberation Route. It reveals all who were captured there and shows the kind of resistance that was taking place there. Hence I was with NADEL. I worked very closely with the giants of that organisation, the likes of Dullah Omar and the kind of arguments that he was actually presenting at political trials actually influenced me a lot. When he made his famous statement, ‘The services of the accused are more valuable on the outside than the inside’. That influenced the students very much. My lecturers were the likes of Judge John Hlophe and Adv. Mahlangu, who is now a candidate for the Constitutional Court, a very promising guy, a very intelligent guy. Unita Cultural Society criss-crossed South Africa going to Wits, Bush University and UWC, at that time Gerwel was the Principal. The likes of Nombonisa Gaza, who came from Cala as well, the gender activist, feminist – she’s my home girl, The current Ambassador to the UN Baso Sangqu, he is now with Nkosazana Zuma, was originally from the University of Transkei too. I was told to leave, I went to Lesotho in my third year of BJuris. Because of the suppressive situation at the time, the whole unit was exposed by cadres who came from the outside. We started the South African Youth Congress. I was on the first executive. Of course I had the opportunity to stay when Chris Hani was in the Transkei, when he was refused indemnity by the Boers at that time. We criss-crossed Transkei with him, he would call me by my clan name. After University I did Articles at Legal Resources Centre. Illiteracy and poverty were rampant in Transkei, I therefore focused on labour relations in my studies. Because of issues such as labour relations the presiding officer was John Hlophe. I was employed by the ANC full-time. I was snatched away from my legal career just as I was about to take my board exams.

I was elected and I went to Parliament. I became the youngest MEC for the ANC at age 28. When Stofile came he separated Arts and Culture from Education, as culture was a societal phenomenon. Previously culture was part of the school curriculum. The ANC government came up with a different framework, it opened the horizons and looked at culture’s role in social cohesion and its impact in mobilising people, in building South Africa. Culture was important to national identity. Previously culture was used divisively.

The ANC government moved culture completely away from education to form a separate Department. Of course the first White Paper was adopted when I was a MEC already, I worked with Roger Jardine, Rob Adams, Steven Sacks and Themba Wakenisen. I carry a lot of institutional memory.

We worked a lot on legislative, policy framework in those days. The likes of Denver Webb, who was part of ACTAG group, became the Head of Department of Arts and Culture in the Eastern Cape. He was part of our panel of experts.

The White Paper was the first grounded policy document in line with the Constitutional imperatives addressing redress and other issues. It came up with the establishment of Legacy Projects to restore the heritage of the oppressed people, these were interventions – the Luthuli Museum, the Nelson Mandela Museum etc. However I am critical of the White weakness. It focused on established cultural bodies as part of the Government of National Unity. It did not address transformation, to the disadvantage of community based cultural organisations. The funding model did not allow for transformation.

Under Prof. Sirayi, the DG in the Province, I became the first CEO of National Heritage Council (NHC). I was part of the 10 year review process which was established to address the unintended consequences of the White Paper, the role of the DAC itself versus its institutions. The DAC must monitor its institutions, but equally it must maintain the intricate balance with the autonomy of the institutions. Therefore the ‘arms-length’ must not be too long or too short to allow the creativity of the institutions. When they do well it is a commendation to the Minister.

People on the Boards are experts and are multi-skilled. They should be guided by the government framework of the day and align themselves with the political framework of the ruling party. We should not question the policy.

We have been funding communities and youth in their projects. The NHC is working with everyone, because we have as a base objective the reality of the White Paper. We have not yet seen community youth organisations graduate to ‘Declared Institutions’. It needs to be opened up. In the
White Paper the transformation of established institutions was assumed that it would happen on its own. Another challenge is that they need be open to this transformation.

Legacy institutions are doing well. We are saying ‘Look at the Lottery and how it operates’. It is a fact that Lottery is housed within a constitutional mandate that does not deal with Arts and Culture. Take the Swedish model where a percentage goes to funding cultural bodies. The current status quo disenables the Minister of Arts and Culture from transforming the sector. The Lottery could have added a great impetus to the Mzansi Golden Economy. The Lottery was established to make interventions to communities.

The Year of Heritage’s success story is the Liberation Heritage Route (LHR). There was a lot of education done on the ground. There was also a lot of misunderstanding around name changes. The LHR provided a platform, ‘the organic link’ and we used the collective memory dealing with families, trusts and emotions. Community-collective-memory.

On the issue of legacy institutions, everyone is forming ‘foundations’ and they may negatively compete for the same resources. It needs to be looked into. We need a framework, a benchmark for how we memorialise icons and role models of society.

Tourism is an output and heritage is an input factor. There should have been a heritage levy. However tourism charges the levies, it needs to share this with heritage. We are told that tourism grows jobs but significantly it is heritage that grows jobs!

An example is that the NHC was involved in the launch of a heritage fund which includes donations in kind, for the monument of Tiyo Soga, the theologian who published the first Xhosa Bible in the 18th century. Progressive businessmen in South Africa came together to fund it, without help from government. A high quality Cenotaph was built. Tiyo Soga also contributed many verses to our National Anthem. The funding framework can be a true partnership.

Another challenge is to look at the National Development Plan and see what it says about heritage. There is a re-colonisation of Africa, the colonisation is not physical but of the mind. Therefore an urgent social cohesion agenda is needed. If you look at our TV we want to open our society and youth to everything. Obligation versus rights! The recent ruling by the Judge on 12 to 16 year olds being allowed to have sex is unacceptable. It is not a matter for justice alone, it is a societal matter. There is a vulgarisation of rights, there is a need for Ubuntu as an African philosophy. The NHC has been running Ubuntu for four years. Communities, when they speak about Ubuntu think about its impact on the personal too. Do we speak about Ubuntu in the boardrooms? The deficit is in the communities! We have started Ubuntu Izimbizo. There is a possibility of the re-colonisation of the mind, a cornerstone of our identity. The unity of South Africa rests on redress and developing a national identity.

Tshwane is the first municipality that has come up with a narrative of names, of who these people are honoured. They have also localised it. Our places must also be a stage for continental and world icons too. A panel of experts is working on this framework, icons from the sports and arts sectors.

The other area is an education project. Our ‘Heritage in Education’ project is working with 50 schools, I realised that our children know their heroes. We are working with SANPARKS and the Department of Basic Education. There is a need to infuse heritage into the curriculum. There is a need for collaboration between Arts and Culture and Education so that there are linkages. On the issue of heritage and the youth, let us come with an audit of curricula up to heritage studies. There is no consistency in the lower levels.

I applaud the current Minister for making synergies between economy and heritage e.g. Nkantolo, the Pondo Revolt etc.. Heritage can mobilise society. Tourism is an output and heritage is an input factor. There should
have been a heritage levy. However tourism charges the levies, it needs to share this with heritage. We are told that tourism grows jobs but significantly it is heritage that grows jobs!

Another area that needs attention is the loss of land and terms in indigenous languages. We need to promote our languages more actively. We have a programme on the ‘Unsung Heroes’ and the Centenary of the Land Act. This is with CONTRALESA and House of Traditional Leaders. E.g. the Ncauza Revolt says you can not tax our animals. There is a resistance to the title deeds. In order to address the current issues South Africa needs to address communities. E.g. my children will not know the names of some birds in isiXhosa, how do we utilise languages? NHC had a meeting with clans to build a partnership with Google, African names and clan names. Knowledge is power. People read, we need to utilise that power. We asked SAFM about stories that are not known e.g. the history of Mendi. People are not aware that Mqhayi contributed four verses to the National Anthem. We need to demystify.

Lastly we meet with Deputy Lands Claim Commission tomorrow, a programme linked to land redistribution. We made a mistake of not including heritage as part of land dispossession and restitution linked to civilisation and traces of civilisation. The whole formation of the ANC is based on the Land Act. Sol Plaatjie went to meet Tengo Jabavu on the impact of the Land Act of 1913. Jabavu did not turn up for that meeting. Sol Plaatjie said: ‘Let us go and interview communities on this matter’. He was aware that much of the land would be taken from the people, 87% of the land, and the people will be left with only 13% of the land which belonged to them. The land was taken away from the people during the wars of dispossession.

NHC is meeting with the traditional leaders to see how we mark the century of the Land Act, the international community needs to be informed of this.

A: Thank you very much for your time and your views.

SM: Thank you for providing me the opportunity too.

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**Mzansi Golden Economy and Heritage**

**Q:** How does heritage impact on MGE?

**A:** It opens a huge field of opportunities in jobs and skills providing platforms for performers, crafters and subsidiary industries.

**Q:** How would the Underwater Heritage Centre support MGE?

**A:** It would create previously unexplored job opportunities and provide aqua skills in the area of marine conservation and recreational work both underwater and on water.

**Q:** South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) has established Maritime Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH), a unit responsible for the safeguarding of our coastal heritage resources. How does this unit fit into the MGE Programme?

**A:** DAC together with SAHRA, Robben Island and the SA Navy launched the annual MUCH education programme in Simonstown which exposes young learners to our heritage and providing life skills like swimming and snorkelling; exposing them to jobs in museums, maritime and tourism.

**Q:** Part of the MGE programme is building cultural precincts in busy areas, how does heritage feature in this?

**A:** The Heritage Unit is driving this MGE Project in all the areas, offering marketing and recreational space for people in the cultural fields.
Since it began centuries ago, the South African struggle has been premised on creating a just and equal society that would, ultimately, be a home for all, irrespective of race, class, position or background.

If African warriors who served under African kings like Ngqika of the Xhosa, Shaka of the Zulus and Moshoeshoe of BaSotho, among others, were to arise from their resting places and brought to the ‘new South Africa,’ they would be amazed by what they would witness and experience.

They would be plunged into a nation-in-the-making that comprises not only of descendants from ethnic groups but people from Europe, Asia, and America and, significantly, other diverse nationalities on the African continent.

They would have to learn not only their mother tongues but English and one or more indigenous African languages depending where they are. Over the last three centuries, South Africa has become unrecognisably different from what our ancestors left behind.

Before 1652, the Khoi, Abantu and other Africans were born into small families, clans and tribes where they would live and grow up among people who did things the same way, producing the same monotony and predictability without any significant influence from outsiders. The question of identity, culture and language, for instance, was clear cut as everything was not only made within that clan or tribe but passed from one generation to the next.

There was no complexity in determining ownership and control of the land and its wealth. But this is the experience, heritage and history that shaped our past. This is the background and world that many of us come from.

Now, if you take a walk in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Mbombela or Polokwane on any day, you will encounter people who come from all over the world: Europe, Asia, China, America and, above all, the entire African continent.

Between 1652 and the present, many of our forefathers – Dutch, English, German, German, Xhosa, Zulu, Kho, Griqua, San, Afrikaner and many others – have not only fought to occupy space but sacrificed their lives to create a Rainbow Nation that would be a home for all.

It was through a bloody struggle that was finally settled through negotiations, that people of this beautiful land now understand that the villages, town and cities of South Africa belong to all people who live in it, united in our diversity.

One of the first Africans to attend university abroad, Pixley ka Isaka Seme returned with an European education to not only espouse a gospel of a new Africa founded on equality, justice and brotherhood but founded the first liberation movement in the continent, that is, the African
National Congress. Ironically, it was the last to attain freedom and the right to self-determination. As early as 1943, two years before the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Seme and comrades released a premier document known as The African Claims Charter that articulated their aspirations for a new Africa that would be a home for all in a non-racial and democratic society.

Previously, they had tried to engage colonial powers in negotiations to make them see sense of making South Africa a home for all. It turned out that they were ahead of their time and myopic colonial leaders could not appreciate what they were offering the world.

The new South Africa that we are grappling to establish in the second decade of the 21st Century could have been attained in the 1940s if power drunken Europeans possessed the intelligence and insight of our African ancestors. But in a world where power is defined by guns and tanks, it is easy to mistake might for right.

To keep this dream alive, Professor Zakes Matthews at Fort Hare proposed the idea of the Congress of the People which culminated in the signing of The Freedom Charter in Kliptown in 1955 which built on what had happened before.

In the mid-1960s, following the banning of the liberation movements of the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress, a young Steve Bantu Biko founded a philosophical movement that espoused Black Consciousness to not only re-ignite self-pride among black people but to “give the world a human face.”

In 1983 we saw Allan Boesak help launch the United Democratic Front – amongst many other local and international initiatives – that again spoke of the urgent need for a South African society that would, ultimately, be a home for all.

It was only when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first president of a democratically elected government in 1994, that we were brought closer to the realisation of this magnificent dream for social cohesion that Archbishop Desmond Tutu called a ‘rainbow nation’.

Significantly, the turning point was the adoption of our world renowned Constitution in 1996 that not only encapsulates the ideals, principles and values that are the foundation of our society but should shape and influence our conduct, behavior and attitude towards ourselves and fellow men.

It is through the preamble to the Constitution that: ‘we the people of South Africa declare that … South Africa belongs to all, united in our diversity.’

To keep the current government in line with this prophetic vision, the Minister of Arts and Culture, Paul Mashatile has been mandated with Outcome 12(b) to build “an empowered, fair and inclusive citizenry” that not only connects this government with what has gone before, but brings to the fore the urgency of one nation consisting of many cultures united in its diversity – first a South African.

Even before the arrival of the white man, Africans have been at the forefront to build these larger societies based on the concept of Ubuntu that would transcend tribe, race, culture and language in the continuous effort to ‘give the world a human face’.

It was in June 2012 that President Jacob Zuma announced the hosting of the forthcoming Social Cohesion Summit that took place on 4 -5 July 2012 in Kliptown. It was at this significant event that every South African who is intuitively connected to what the original African warriors were fighting was been aroused.

Unfortunately, South Africa is a society that comes from a conflicted past except in the last 18 years where sane and visionary citizens continue to translate the ideals in the Constitution into a practical programme of action.

Unfortunately, there will always be blacks and whites however united in diversity. The time has come for us to be nothing else but what former ANC President Oliver Tambo called ‘caring and proud South Africans who are neither black nor white.’

Walking the talk has certainly begun, ironically. In fact, South Africans are doing much better than Western societies when it comes to building a world with a human face.
Much has happened in the relationship between the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and the Presidency, between the DAC and its stakeholders, especially grassroots communities, and within the department itself to put social cohesion on the map.

Since its inception, the DAC has strived for the last 10 years to assume a leadership role and assert its responsibility as the custodian of the ideal to build a ‘fair, empowered and active citizenry’. But during the centenary year, the DAC has surprised not only itself but its critical observers when it not only hosted a successful Social Cohesion Summit but turned social cohesion into the new buzz word in the socio-economic and cultural vocabulary. Importantly, the summit was preceded by community conversations for ordinary folk to speak out on issues that were a threat to national reconciliation and unity.

Everyone – from the State President, political parties, unionists, priests, business and church leaders, radicals, activists, students, government officials and grassroots communities – is talking about social cohesion. This is a great achievement.

It follows the successful mounting of one of the most important gatherings in the last 18 years since the dawn of freedom. Over 2,500 delegates, guests and other representatives met at the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication on 4–5 July 2012. The purpose was simply to answer one question: ‘What needs to be done to build an inclusive society?’.

Getting an answer to that question has been the responsibility of the DAC ever since former President Thabo Mbeki separated the department to become independent and autonomous in 2004.

The DAC has always been pivotal to defining programmes that would point towards social cohesion. This was best confirmed in the outcomes-based approach that mandated the DAC to lead on Outcome 12B which leads on social cohesion.

The year 2012 marked a turning point when the Minister of Arts and Culture, Paul Mashatile explained at the opening of the summit that the event was ‘not another talk shop but must assist us to develop a set of shared values that define who we are as South Africans and what kind of society we seek to build.’

Things moved at fast speed when the Cabinet approved the Social Cohesion Strategy on 13 June 2012. Thus for the first time in 18 years, the country now not only has a strategy that identifies problems but provides recommendations to build a more inclusive society. Since the adoption of the strategy, the voice of government is now...
present when it comes to discourse on threats and solutions to social cohesion. And the five major obstacles are the following:
- Economic inequality
- Spatial division
- Prejudice and discrimination
- Social interaction, cooperation and solidarity
- National unity and identity

Significantly, the summit culminated in the public reading of a 12-point declaration that spelled out the programme of action not only how to resolve the above obstacles but to encourage active citizenry to work together with government to achieve solutions.

The hosting of the summit has not only elevated the role of DAC in government but has restored faith in the credibility of its leadership. Social cohesion is now an integral part of the government-wide programme that has to be adopted by all inside and outside government.

Significantly, the hosting of the summit and formulation of a detailed implementation framework does not signal the end of the social cohesion programme. Instead, it now needs to be taken to the next level. The social cohesion programme will, ultimately, contribute to creating a caring and proud society based on economic justice and social equality.

For now, the DAC will continue to conduct community conversations. These are aimed at mobilising ordinary citizens, especially at grassroots level, to be agents of the society they wish to see in their lifetime.

It was at the National Social Cohesion Colloquium under the theme ‘Building a Caring Nation’ at the Durban International Convention Centre in 2009 that a resolution was taken to convene community conversations throughout the country.

These were platforms for communities to openly discuss issues that pose a threat to social cohesion with the aim to find solutions. In fact, they played a pivotal role in determining the burning issues that were translated into the commission themes at the summit.

In 2010 the DAC entered into a Service Level Agreement with a consortium comprising of three service providers. They included Diaho Social Technologies (DST) which handled Free State, Gauteng and Mpumalanga. There was Heartlines which conducted conversations in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and North West. Finally, there was the Independent Development Trust (IDT) which covered Limpopo, Northern Cape and Western Cape.

To date, a total of 49 dialogue events were held as part of the build-up to the national social cohesion summit. Significantly, almost 3,000 participated in these no-holds-barred sessions between May and June 2012. They were people from all walks of life, including all races classes, ages, religious, political, language and other societal formations. It was at these sessions that provincial and local government, community-based organisations, traditional leadership, diverse political formations, trade unions and business formations made an equal contribution in the assessment of social cohesion.

The approaches of the dialogues were very scientific and used the Community Conversation
Capacity Enhancement Methodology which highlights and emphasizes each community’s capacity to initiate, drive and realize change within itself. This is very crucial for mobilising citizens to be agents of what they want to see happen. It encourages ordinary folks to assume self-responsibility rather than waiting for government to delivery.

In fact, embedded principles of the Asset Based Community Development Methodology help folks realise that there are existing assets (human/social/physical/natural/financial capital) within the community that need to be nurtured and maximised for these communities to bring positive change in to their own environment.

The community conversations have proven not only to be instruments of psychological empowerment but are helping motivate ordinary folk to take their future into their own hands. For this reason, some people have garnered courage to speak freely and openly about what they perceived to be threats to social cohesion. Some of the challenges they cited include the following:

- Socio-economic factors including land access, poverty, inequality and unemployment
- Corruption and trust in democratic institutions and leadership
- Moral degeneration e.g. promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, respect for elders etc.
- Perceptions around immigration policy and xenophobia
- Psycho-social factors rooted in history
- Geospatial patterns rooted in history
- High crime rates and the absence of rule of law together with an ineffective criminal justice system
- Lack of inter-cultural awareness and tribalism
- Media information
- Poor service delivery
- Rampant drug, alcohol and substance abuse among the youth
- Lack of service delivery
- Poor education system
- Limited initiatives to afford people with disabilities an active place in our society
- Conflict between the role of traditional leadership and modern democratic institutions
- The lack of sports and recreational facilities accessible to the wider public
- The downgrading of FET colleges and the absence of tertiary institutions in some provinces
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Post-summit feedback sessions are scheduled to be conducted across the country. Most importantly, the feedback sessions include communicating the summit proceedings to the communities on a 12 point declaration.

There is no doubt that a giant step has been taken by the DAC to provide leadership and direction on matters relating to social cohesion.

DG Sibusiso Xaba
Speaker Max Sisulu, President Jacob Zuma, Minister Paul Mashatile, Premier Helen Zille and Gwede Mantashe
Chairperson of the AU Commission, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma
Opening and Closing performances
at The Orange AFCON Cup of Nations 2013
Opening performances and closing performances at the AFCON 2013. Department of Arts and Culture contributed R18.5 million to the cultural programmes.
Closing performances

Zonke

Mi Casa

D’banj
A Man of the People

Interview with Thami ka Plaatjie

ARTivist speaks to Thami ka Plaatjie about his love for history, his role as a proponent of people’s history and his work in progress, a biography on Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe.

Sheraton Hotel, Pretoria. January 2013
A: How did you come to focus on People’s history?

TkP: I have been an activist. Having grown up in a township, I have been conscientised into politics, ANC politics, AZAPO politics, PAC politics, that puts people, specifically young people, into the centre of the discourse, politics that seek to strives for the interests and for the struggles of the common person or the common man.

These are the views that have always been with me until WITS came out with their Popular History and a small booklet by Leslie Witz put it at a different level. It was the first book that taught you how to do interviews, how to talk to people, so it laid out a scientific basis that aspiring researchers or scholars could use to write people’s histories.

But also of importance is that I come from an oral history, story-telling background. I come from a very large family and having grown up poor for the better part of time, we would spend a lot of time listening to stories, my mother’s work experience, my brother’s, my sister’s experience as a nurse at the Natalspruit Nursing College where she was studying. These were not like your African oral stories that have been repeated over time. We were exposed to those at an early time, but these were general stories – day to day stories of what happened at work. We were exposed to those at an early time, but these were general stories – day to day stories of what happened at work. And as a result you got a picture of your mother’s employer without having met her or him. You would know more about them by virtue of the information you had. My mother and father were very dramatic people. So they would tell these stories in very dramatic fashion. They would almost mimic how the employer talks, how the employer walks, how the children in the employer’s house behave. So you developed this vivid imagination. This gave me an early orientation to story-telling.

I also grew up selling meat to augment the family’s income because of the poverty we were exposed too. I would buy meat at Noord in Johannesburg, take it on the train and directly take them to the hostels because they did not have refrigerators then. Sometimes they would cook the meat and encourage you to eat with them. And if you are inquisitive, you would ask them where they come from. The hostel people would be happy if you took an interest in them. Because of your struggle background, you would ask them what wars of resistance were fought. The little stories you have you could link with the places they came from. Then they would become animated. So you create a new relationship. They would convey messages through history. That is why I still want to be a film maker to convey interesting stories and powerful messages.

A: Is this not how the telling of history humanizes us?

TkP: An African intellectual has said we are but tools of history. And history will always find new tools. As historians we are, to some extent, the reincarnation of the people whose stories we tell because these people have died. For them not to die by having their stories killed, they need to live in us. So for as long as we live, as long as we are prepared to remind others of those who once lived, we are reincarnated. Because it means that those people have not died. Had their stories died, we would say – as the English say – that they are non-existent. But in an African set-up, they have passed on to another world; and we are the embodiment of them. We are the reincarnation of people who have died, whose stories were killed. They live in us. We represent their voices, their anguish.

For instance I came across documents of APLA. These were about PAC men who were hanged in Pretoria Central Prison. Not much has been written about them. In the first lot there were about fifty or sixty of them. There are files and files, more than two thousand of them, that tell the story of each and every one of those people, – how they were arrested, how they were sentenced and how they were finally prosecuted.

As a historian I am privy to this worldview that happened before I was born in 1965 and 1966. Because I am privy to those stories, I feel I am bound by duty at some point to tell their stories so that I almost release them, their spirits and they get to be honoured, to be acknowledged for the work they did. I did an interview with a cousin of one of them. The cousin told me that on the eve of their execution at Pretoria Central Prison, the family came to visit them. They were baffled as a family that these men were singing on the eve of their execution. And they were singing this song: ‘thina sizwe’ – one of the songs that Miriam Makeba also popularised. When they had an opportunity to talk to him, this man said: ‘Do not mourn for our loss, because we are going to die. That is guaranteed. But tell the
Youth League issue is an old issue. Let us look at how the PAC left – it is an old matter. History is littered with ample examples of these experiences and solutions.

A: At this present moment in our history, are we not as South Africans beginning to resemble a people who have forgotten our history or who consciously do not want to remember our history:

TkP: We were almost on the point of erasing history from our psyche and from our nation, until we arrived at the centenary of the ANC. The centenary has exposed how we know less about ourselves, our history. For the first time we heard about some of the leaders of the ANC whom some did not know existed. Some people had thought that Mandela had created the ANC. For the first time people heard lectures about the ANC.

But even with this approach, it was incomplete as the ANC was not made up only of these leaders. It was made up by so many communities and so many individuals who remain to date unmentioned and unrecognized and unhonoured.

So the centenary has given us an opening to occupy and fill this gap. The Centenary has provoked us. Because we lack a national approach to history, we have been forced to become accidental historians. People forgot even the 1913 Land Act. Now that it is the centenary, people want to commemorate. We are so attached to this mood of celebration – a fiesta orientation and type of mentality. I hope that we are genuine and that it is not just a passing moment of celebration. It should be a lasting orientation.

A: Going outside activist and party politics, people say the youth of today is disorientated and only concerned about the here and now. Maybe that is the characteristic of youth in general. Are we in danger of the increased Americanisation of our society and also the whole focus on material wealth and accumulation and not the search for the past, preservation of memory and spiritual health and wealth.

TkP: We have always been under threat from the Superpowers who try to import their ideas, their religion, their technologies, their particular brand of truth. We have always been a dumping site as less developed nations. But in the past we as society, as churches and political groups, would mitigate those influences with youth clubs, cultural clubs and dance clubs created of our own volition. We had ways and means to mitigate the intrusion of such influences. But today we cannot protect ourselves.
Our languages are becoming extinct. Now our languages are optional under our condonation. It is ironic. Once our children do not understand their languages, they will lose sight of those libraries of knowledge that those languages have created. For example there is the Mqhayi poem ‘The making of a servant’ that is written in Xhosa. The poem is about a young, powerful cow but it is being tamed to plough the field. The poem is about the series of humiliations that the cow is put through, until it loses its dignity and loses its pride and dignity in order to become a servant. If our children do not know Xhosa, they will not get to know this poem. They will not know the story of the cow that is being subjugated – where it could have had its freedom.

A: Why are we allowing it?
TkP: Our approach was not multifaceted. We were looking at political freedom. We were in a rush to occupy the old master’s house, to be tenants. Instead of our own symbol of history, something to venerate the heroic struggle, and resemble our aesthetic, we occupied the master’s house and gained our political freedom. We were in a hurry. We postponed our other freedoms. We tried to catch up through BEE. Education, arts and culture became poor cousins of a political dictate. And culture is not accidental through mere ceremonies and function. To date I refuse to wear a suit. I do not understand why we wear them. It baffles me that in Africa where it is so hot we wear a jacket and a tie around our necks.

A: Why have you chosen to write about Sobukwe?
TkP: He is one icon whose story has not been told, whose message is powerful. I first heard about Sobukwe in 1984. I had been a member of COSAS and when we were detained, I was put in a cell with the PAC, then they told me about Sobukwe. All the time I had only heard about Mandela before this. I was given documents to read. What excited me was the sheer power of his thoughts. His ideas were continent-wide Pan African – he said that we would create one United States of Africa. When you have this orientation, you cannot be xenophobic. We are all children of the same family. Africa has many rooms of the same house. I got intellectually fascinated. At an early age, he gives a speech at Fort Hare and he speaks of the Africa to come that he visualises. Ultimately he sees that one day when we are free we shall enter the golden gates of a united states of Africa - a new Africa he says: ‘where the colour of the skin will be as insignificant as the shape of one’s nose’. Non-racialism he says, is singular, not plural. There is only one human race. It gives you a tool to understand the human race. I said: why not. I felt bound by duty to tell the story.

As I researched, I started visiting hostels and PAC veterans in Kofimvaba, Western Cape, Northern Cape. Someone would say he was my schoolmate. Another would say that he was at circumcision school with me. Some would say that he was my school teacher. Some would cry. An old man in East London recalled that Hlathi had sent us to the battlefield. ‘We were migrant labourers, uneducated and one day three men came to our hostel. Then we are told these men are members of the new movement. The President is young and he is going to talk to us.’ He was then a lecturer at WITS in 1959. He taught Zanele Mbeki in 1954. The book has her inputs. Aggrey Klaaste spoke about him. He touched their lives.

The old man told him that Sobukwe said: ‘I come from Graaff Reinet where a goat grows as big as the calf of a cow and when it moves, it makes a pounding sound which awakens a woman in her bed. He tells them the story of a farmer who had a dog who is used all the time and stays outside the house even in the rain. A dog who is tied up every day. The farmer who uses the dog to hunt, then skins and eats the meat, but only gives him the bone. You are that dog, Sobukwe says, brought here to serve a master.’

Then he tells the story of a dog that is free, a dog that hunts for itself and needs no master. ‘You are like twins. You cannot beat one in the presence of the other. There are six of us for every one of them.’ Then the men ask: ‘What must we do?’ Sobukwe says: ‘you must not give up. On the 21 March I shall take you to battle.’ ‘We responded to that call. He led from the front. He went to Robben Island with us.’ Sobukwe was kept apart at Robben Island.

It is this imagery that I understood where politics is fused with culture and history, where it lives within you. It is not a transaction. It becomes something profound and it defines the orientation of the world. This is what attracted me to this story.

A: Where do you go from here after the Sobukwe biography?
TkP: I would like to write about Duma Nokwe, the Secretary General of the ANC. God willing. A powerful leader who has been forgotten.
Sobukwe: IN A CLASS OF HIS OWN

Extract from the upcoming biography of Robert Sobukwe by Thami Ka Plaatjie

Mr Robert Sobukwe
Sobukwe attended secondary school at Healdtown in the Eastern Cape. The Eagle was a Healdtown official publication that featured stories on the life of the institution. Staff and students contributed to the publication and it was widely read. It had an editorial committee that assessed the worth and relevance of essays or articles submitted. Sobukwe was a regular contributor to The Eagle. He served on the sports and entertainment committees, and one of the articles speaks of his contribution to sport. He was also a member of the Men’s Social Club and devoted an article to his assessment of its success. It is imperative to quote Sobukwe’s article in The Eagle in some detail as it is the first surviving written article by Sobukwe when he was still a student at Healdtown.

In spite of the discouraging nature of student mind which tends to tire of a thing before it has fully understood it, the club has carried on throughout this year, with its work of training students in the intricate conventions of social gatherings. The meetings have been well attended and the behaviour of the members has been remarkable. The programme has been of such a varied and interesting character that the members have come to await Friday with restless anticipation and a feeling of indefinable rapture. We have been the guests of the ‘Far East’ this session, and what a pleasant evening we spent with them! We are intending to avail ourselves of the pleasure of their company on the 4th October and we are determined to make the evening an outstanding success. Our thanks are due to the indefatigable Mr Noble, Mr de Villiers and the Housemaster, who have followed the club’s progress with parental solicitude, and whose assistance and advice have contributed a great deal to the success of the Club. A cultured man is a gem of his community.

This article demonstrated Sobukwe’s early talent and ease with the written word. His writing is very expressive and lucid. His true character is evident in his writing; and he was indeed a well-mannered and cultured person who was keen to understand social etiquette. From his writing we can discern a sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words. It was this command of English sound and fertile mind that was gifted with the apt choice of words.

In another article, Sobukwe wrote about the intricate and contentious subject of fear. It is a more abstract topic than the above, Sobukwe illustrated various forms of fear. He listed the fear of the unknown, the fear of evil, fear of failure and the individual's mind was in a serene state of lethargy, benumbs the senses, petrifies the body and paralyses the mind; but fear anticipated, galvanises one into action. How often have men taken the offensive because they felt a crises approaching and have steeled and adjusted themselves to avoid an exhibition of fear. ‘To Fear’ said one man’, is not cowardice, but to flee from fear that is cowardice.’ I say to fear is not cowardice, and to flee from fear but a modest way of avoiding fear.

Sobukwe’s social life

Sobukwe had a hectic social life at Healdtown it would seem. He was also a secretary of the Xenophone Student Organisation. According to Rev Gqubula, the Xenophone Student Organisation catered for students who came from areas such as Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown and Graaff-Reinet. It was mainly a social organisation that was preoccupied with the social needs of the students from the areas mentioned. The choice Xenophone for a name of a social organisation was without any specific reason. It could have been that they wanted to set themselves apart from other local student organisations. It could also have been a youthful obsession with bombastic terms that gave an air of seriousness. It was youthful indulgence at the extreme.

Sobukwe: school romance

Like any young person Sobukwe fell in love.

There was a human side to this emerging young intellectual. Sobukwe’s first serious girlfriend while at Healdtown was Mamsy Pelem who hailed from Grahamstown and they made an unusual couple as Mamsy was very short while Sobukwe was tall! The affair did not last long and the cause of the break-up was not known even to the closest friends. In his senior and final years Sobukwe began another relationship with his fellow class-mate, Patricia Mayaba, who was popularly known as Nogwali - and who later on became Mrs Bholofo.

She was beautiful with an engaging smile and friendly disposition. Their affair raised eyebrows and to flee from fear but a modest way of avoiding fear.

Sobukwe wrote his matriculation examination and passed with a first-class pass in 1946. Owing to
the fact that he had started school rather late and also because of his ill health, Sobukwe completed matric at a rather mature age of 22. The school principal at Healdtown High School could not countenance the prospect that the intellectually gifted product of his school should perish in the wilderness of city life and, in the words of Ulysses, ‘rust unburnished not to shine in use’. Mr George Caley saw to it that Sobukwe received a bursary to proceed with his university education at Fort Hare.

The missionary benefactor had once more come to Sobukwe’s rescue and enabled him to proceed with his studies. His family could not afford the necessary fees for his higher education and his father must have been elated to see his son proceed to university. It was a great feat in those days for an African to be admitted to an university. Such news spread like wildfire throughout his community as in the 1940s very few Africans were university students or graduates. It was a great source of pride for a parent to have his or her child numbered amongst university students, especially when such parents were from economically humble circumstances. It was a known fact that children of the well-to-do and children of chiefs were usually those who received higher education as it was meant to prepare them for the chieftaincy.

Sobukwe address students at Healdtown

It was the custom for students at Healdtown to hold a Completers’ Social for those who had finishing their training. Sobukwe gave an address at the Completers’ Social at Healdtown in 1945. The Rev Qgubule recounted a report received from Mr Pope (one of the teachers at Healdtown) about the address. Qgubule and others were not allowed to attend since the occasion was reserved for the completers only. ‘Mr Pope, who was now our English teacher told our class that the speech by Sobukwe to the Completers’ Social was one of the best speeches that he had ever heard from anybody, black or white.’

Sobukwe arrived at Fort Hare in 1947 and enrolled for a BA degree. To pay for his fees and admission at Fort Hare, Sobukwe received a loan of £20 pounds from the Principal of Healdtown, another £20 from the welfare trust, additional funding from the Cape Education Department and pledges from the teachers at Healdtown who were going to ensure that he had pocket

Sobukwe’s subjects included Native Administration, English and Xhosa. His predilection for languages made him an ideal candidate for the liberal arts and invariably his majors became English and Xhosa. There was a new crop of first year students who arrived at Fort Hare in the same year as Sobukwe. These included John Nyathi Pokela, Nhato Motlana, Ntsu Makhehele, Denis Siwisa, Mr Galaza Stamper, G. Buthelezi, Joe Matthews and Duma Nokwe. Most of these students were to play a critical role in the struggle for justice in South Africa in later years. There was also an equally competent and enthusiastic group of academics at Fort Hare those days.

Amongst them in 1947 were a number of academics who later had indelible influence in the mind of the emerging young generation of leaders including Sobukwe. Academics that can be mentioned are: Prof. Dent, Jordan Ngubane, Prof. Z.K. Matthews, Cecil Ntloko, A.C. Jordan and Godfrey Pitje. There was also an English master, Prof. D. Stuart, whose classes Sobukwe enjoyed, given his passion and love for literature and English. These were the intellectual elite of the country and all congregated at Fort Hare to impart knowledge to the emerging leaders. These academics were accomplished individuals and impressive scholars in their own right. They had attained distinguished degrees and some of the highest qualifications imaginable for the Africans of the day. They were the icons and deserving role models upon whom this emerging class of African young leaders looked upon for inspiration.

Upon his arrival at Fort Hare, Sobukwe was not politically active. His political views were immature and mainly academic. He may have been influenced by the Unity Movement that was at its height during the mid-1940s but seemed not to have committed to any ideological affiliation. His nascent political ideas were formed by the knowledge gained from the exposure to literature. Xhosa and English literature must have exposed him to the various works of authors such as Shakespeare; and S.E.K. Mqhayi who had left an indelible impression in the curious and fecund mind of the young Sobukwe. He harboured a deep love for Africa and was concerned for the welfare of others.

So, it can be said that his initial interest in politics may have been inspired by philanthropy, altruism and a curious, youthful mind. His education and knowledge helped to sharpen his skill as a natural leader and his gifts of oratory which were soon noticed at Fort Hare. But it was his strong character and the power of his spirit that attracted people to him. When people came into contact with him, his power was infectious and they became spellbound. Achmat Lahere remarked: ‘There was no way that you could remain the same after coming across Sobukwe. You had to be different. He had that effect on people. He had a lasting impact’.

His unassuming disposition belied his inner strength. He had the gentleness of a ferocious bear and a Victorian gentlemanly air about him. His broad knowledge armed him with a lethal tool that he used effectively. Both in the expression of kindness and in the assertion of a strongly held view, he employed the most fitting, witty and devastating words that left no room for questions and doubt. In an argument, Sobukwe left his opponents with little intellectual room to jettison his views. Mrs Zanele Mbeki observes, ‘He was a very cultured man and very accessible to his students.’

There was a tradition at Fort Hare that at the end of each year, the younger students hosted
a farewell party for those graduating from the institution. Sobukwe was selected to deliver an address on behalf of the first year students at Fort Hare on the occasion of the Fresher’s Social held at Wesley House. This honour shows that his leadership qualities had been recognised and his oratory abilities were acknowledged by his fellow first year students for him to qualify to speak on their behalf.

Edwin Makoti, one of the PAC stalwarts, recalled that the event marked the emergence of a leader. ‘This was his first public platform that he was accorded by other students to speak on their behalf. He made a scathing attack on the senior students for their snobbery, excessive drinking and womanising and lack of patriotism. He said that under the circumstances, when they graduate, their qualification would be equivalent to Baboon’s Arses instead of Bachelors of Arts.’ Sobukwe challenged what he regarded as false superiority displayed by the senior students who were leaving the institution. This elitist conduct, according to him, was not founded on fact or any other form of reasonable justification. It was ostentatious and had no value or merit for the national cause of the African people as it was self-consuming and egoistic. Sobukwe decried their conduct and posturing based on elite assumptions, seniority and snobbery. He embraced a simple and magnanimous approach to life where all were seen and treated as equals.

Denis Siwisa wrote in a letter that ‘The “Senior and Saner” students as they referred to themselves, felt insulted and hurriedly convened a House Meeting in which Robert was accused of having insulted them’.

The meeting of the seniors took serious exception to Sobukwe’s remarks and urged that he be punished. Makoti describes what happened: ‘A highly charged meeting of the senior under-graduates resolved that Sobukwe should withdraw his attack and apologise by letter which would be circulated to all the surrounding educational institutions or be subjected to solitary confinement in the bathroom outside of class hours until he repented, and in that period of punishment, no one should speak to him.’

The decision to put Sobukwe in solitary confinement was taken to the Dean of Students at Fort Hare. Makoti continues: ‘The dean of the college approved the decision and put it to Sobukwe, who defiantly refused to apologise and took his bed into the bathroom. In a little over a week, the whole student body stood down and rescinded its decision.’

When Sobukwe refused to apologise and took his place in the solitary confinement of the bathroom, Siwisa explains the undergraduates’ reaction: ‘We Freshers rallied to Robert’s defence and complained to the warder, Rev. Crag. He refused to interfere. We thereupon approached [the] Superintendent of the Victoria Hospital where Robert had once been a patient. He immediately contacted the Warden and told him this confinement in a damp bathroom would be detrimental to his health, as he had once been a T.B. patient at the Victoria Hospital. He was immediately taken out.’

Sobukwe stood his ground, regardless of popular sentiments. By this time he had not formalised his views into a coherent political philosophy. However, there was in the young Sobukwe a flame which years at Fort Hare helped to kindle and set ablaze. Students filled the highly charged meeting of the senior students who had been offended by Sobukwe’s remarks and demanded that he withdraw them forthwith. They argued that such an apology was to be formalised by means of a letter. Their actions were tantamount to extracting a confession from a rock: Sobukwe’s principles were formidable and entrenched with a stubbornness that was a far cry from his humble and amiable personality.

In later years Sobukwe advised the students at Fort Hare to use their education not for self-aggrandisement but for the glory and advancement of Africa and the community: ‘A word to those who are remaining behind. You have seen by now what education means to us: the identification of ourselves with the masses. Education to us means service to Africa. In whatever branch of learning you are there for Africa. You have a mission; we all have a mission. A nation to build we have, a God to glorify, a contribution clear to make towards the blessing of mankind. We must be the embodiment of our people’s aspirations. And all we are required to do is to show the light and the masses’ will and the way.’
Three Poems by
Frank Meintjies

monuments, in strange places

for some reason
(somewhy)
i like monuments
hilltop ones
with hundreds of stone steps leading up
to them
out of breath
i reach the top
usually
in a grass patch
below the sculpted form
abstract or realist
i spit out phlegm
i read the inscription
words, moments,
dates, unveilings
burned into the past
a past of creaking wood & iron
references often obscure (to me)

the exclamation mark
of a cobwebbed narrative

the sculptor’s bold attempt
to cast
the messy past
in simple terms

some hero …
& sometimes
i piss
near the lead-clay feet

then i turn
to face away
to gaze sweepingly
at town, at gown
or
folds & pleats
of mountain ranges

more geography soul
than history man

my eyebrowed eyes
fly to space

monumental delight;
i love
breathless moments
dry lips
the cool wind
on the head
& neck of the long stone stairs

johannesburg

slithering through the portals
of my brain
i’ve visited the famed byzantium
been to thebes that workers built
heard the mapungubwe voices

the stark truth of atlantis
slashes through
the fetid channels of my mind

searching for meaning
at last, i come to this city
cursed by gold, blessed by fool’s truth
& my rusted heart
hidden
in the crevices of this rugged terrain

at the continent’s navel
a convolution of flesh
space & place
under the ascendant moon
& a wicked sun
below the fire-warmed midriff, arid in parts
& somewhere in the sky
a bent elbow

space speaking
howling, keening, growling, accent-laden tones
naming & renaming itself
according to undulations & moments
space finding voice between passion & depletion, love & forced entry
by vacant lots & stark looks & teeming gathering points & stormwater culverts
desire to rise, predisposed to pulse
buildings clutching
the gleaming facades, workshops, looping tracks, small cocoons
& places of fear & loathing

my eyes follow
as mechanical vehicles
compact sand & rock, smear gunite, pour cement, sink piles
buttress the huge dwellings
that overlook the scenes

a red location-pin
in the thorn tree land
in stale & tense times
breaking down identities
forging selves
stewing hopes
emitting signals

murmurs, musings, rousings, voicings, purrings, spoutings, spurrings

poem

let it glide on leather
or 4x4 on sandpaper
towards the sheer edge
of a steel blade pause

so many eyes, coconut white
scooping at the slush of night
so many teeth, tearing the bark
chewing at sinews of the contractual ark

in the fizz & sputter of the fusion-pot:
words
buckle, twist & then burn bright
South African train ride

No one steeks the drivers on the Gautrain
Braais the carriages
Verneuks the passengers
Or plays staffrider from its golden frame.
On the Gautrain the worst frustration is
Will the cell phone connection hold
Can I use my 3G
Why doesn’t it run after 8 pm?
No one throws bricks at the Gaubus drivers
Burns their homes, shoots at them from dark alleys
No-one chews gum on the Gautrain.
On the Gautrain we ride quietly
Speaking in genteel voices
To the muted sound of ipads and ipods
And the discreet rustle of papers
Shuttling in silent speed from here to there
From Joburg to Pretoria to ORT to places where the money lives
And the bright people go.

Metro station thrums with the smell of mealies
Old oil vetkoek
Freshly broaied chicken
The buzz of lazy flies
Girl friends chat loudly as they squeeze between the steamy
bodies on their way to work
Mrs Mkwanazi finds a seat, rests her aching legs, her swollen
ankles
Feet bulging over the too tight shoes.
The Metrorail shakes rattles and rolls its busy way
Kalafong Attridgeville George Goch Nancefield Kliptown

First class
Second class
Third class
The South African train rolls forward
Gautrain
Gravy train
Metro rail
Rovos Rail

Which ticket did you get dealt?
Which train are you riding?
And what’s the destination?

Moon nation

An autumnal moon floats brilliant over the black tar of Soutpansberg road
Its luminous light at odds with cigarette stompies, niknak packets
Black label bottles
Car fumes
And the detritus of suburban life

In the carnage of laden shopping trolleys this afternoon, a man,
A little girl, her brother, dulled with the unkempt dust of poverty
A few coins clutched in his hand
Eyes searching for bargains to feed the family.

An autumnal moon floats brilliant over the rusting roofs of Hammanskraal, Winterveld,
Glances off the swimming pools of Brooklyn, Waterkloof, Rietfontein,
Lights the way for lovers between the shacks
Under the giant tree ferns
In the back seats of skoroskoros and SUVs.
The cold winds of change were blowing through the country in 1994. I first met Mam’ Lauretta Ngcobo when exiles were returning home following the release of some political prisoners and the unbanning of the liberation movement. The exact circumstances escape me now but I was a journalist for the City Press and an aspirant writer.

She was introduced to me by the late UKZN publisher, Glenn Cowley who had just re-released her banned novel, And They Didn’t Die. At the time, she was in her sixties and somewhat retired. Cowley told me that she had written one of the most important novels in the history of local literature and had asked me to not only review but interview her.

Mam’ Lauretta and I met and talked for what seemed to be forever. She was forthcoming, revealing articulate and yet humble, self-effacing and genuine in her political self-expression. She was an epitome of what one assumed to be the perfect picture of a former exile woman: deep thought, profound thoughts and introspective. There was no doubt that she was not only concerned about the past but desired to establish its link with the present and the future. She had spent far too much time outside her mother-land to realise the urgent need to reconnect.

She had shared intimate details of her upbringing in rural KwaZulu-Natal in the 1940s by a widowed teacher mother who planted the seed of her love for reading. Despite being forced to walk 20km to a village school, she went on to become one of the first women to obtain a BA degree from Fort Hare University.

Significantly, she told of how she, her husband AB and family were forced to leave South Africa for exile which saw her live in Swaziland, Zambia and, finally, England where she was to stay for almost 30 years working as a teacher.

But the essence of her life was how her passion and love for storytelling ultimately saw her use her artistic creative talent to not only chronicle the tragic events of the Sharpeville Massacre in Cross of Gold but to raise questions and create awareness about the Land Act of 1913 in And They Didn’t Die.

It could be said that Mam’ Lauretta is a pioneering political thriller writer, a historian, a Pan-Africanist, a political and cultural activist and, above all, an African feminist of a special kind.

Put another way, she is a rare gem of a female political writer who is one of the country’s best kept secret. Perhaps she is the only black African woman who has written a novel on the impact of the Land Act of 1913.

Although she is, largely, unknown in the country, Mam’ Lauretta Ngcobo has had a profound impact on literary developments and trends in the 20th Century. In fact, she can rightly be regarded as the trendsetter when it comes to political fiction writing that addresses the sensitive issue of land ownerships. If her work had not been banned and was promoted and marketed, she would definitely have been a household name. She would have been a celebrated and successful author as early as 1981 when her first novel, Cross of Gold came out. Significantly, it was the first fiction book on the tragic events of the Sharpeville shooting in 1960.

It was this massacre that forced her into exile, as her husband, AB Ngcobo, was one of the masterminds behind the nationwide anti-pass march. Although then living in exile for two decades, she was in the prime of her life as a creative writer and harnessed all the ranger, resentment and frustration to creative writing. Apartheid repression through banning and turning possession of her book into a crime deprived her of acknowledgement and recognition in her own country. The lack of recognition and unavailability of her first book is a poignant reminder of how voices perceived to be radical, militant and pan-Africanist
continue to be marginalised in the country. In Cross of Gold, Mam’ Lauretta links the brutal slaying of Africans in Sharpeville to white greed and monopoly of the economy. This is reminiscent of the recent events in Marikana, for instance. The thoughts reflected through the fiction are revolutionary when one realises that they are still relevant today. It more than highlights Mam’ Lauretta’s understanding that the role of the writer is to tell stories that are part of a people’s history, heritage and culture.

Indeed, when one looks at her follow-up novel And They Didn’t Die, written at the height of the struggle in the mid-1980s, the need for such a book becomes more obvious. It is the 100th anniversary of the first women’s anti-pass march where they showed their unrelenting anger and determination to take the apartheid regime head-on. Hundreds of women heeded the call for resistance in the then Orange Free State and their struggle has neither been acknowledged nor given the recognition it deserves. Most importantly, the novel deals with the Native Land Act of 1913 which resulted not only in the dispossession of the land but also of its fearlessness and profound insight and analysis of the male dominated patriarchal super-structure.

Significantly, Mam’ Lauretta has kept her eyes on the prize even though knowing that writing political literature will not see her elevated to the status of a hero. However, denying the significance and contribution of her stance has been difficult. The post-apartheid democratic regime has moved swiftly to establish a link between the past, present and the future. When we look back at Mam’ Lauretta’s life, we see that everything comes to those who wait. The apartheid regime may have tried to make her the country’s best kept secret and the nation may be unprepared for her daring and intuitive writing that concerns itself with contemporary history. But she is reclaiming her space as a bold, visionary and prophetic writer who desires to be the custodian of our arts, culture, heritage and literature.

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To some degree, the re-emergence of Mam’ Lauretta epitomises the age-old question of the role of the writer in society. Is art for its own sake or should it pursue a political agenda? In her case, the answer to this riddle is simple and straightforward. It can be said, with the greatest confidence, that she believes that literature is a vehicle to capture and reflect a people’s language, history, heritage and culture. The artist must establish a link between the past, present and the future.

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In her, we find a Prodigal Daughter, the title of her latest anthology of former women exile about their experiences, who has been willing to put the interests of her people, first. At a time when African women writers are getting awards for well-written but superficial books devoid of political substance, in Mam’ Lauretta we find a highly conscious and committed writer who is a historian, a Pan-Africanist, a political and cultural activist, a feminist of a special kind and, above all, an articulate story-teller.

What she has been able to do is to reaffirm the role of the African writer as a mirror of a people’s soul. It is a good thing that there is not enough darkness in the world to shadow the light from her candle.
An African proverb states that: “Until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter.” The authors of two new history books have given the ‘lions’ a voice, for they have put together the story of black people in the Anglo-Boer War, a story which others had chosen to forget and nearly obliterate from the annals of history. The Anglo-Boer War is regarded as a war between the Afrikaners and the British. History books have been relatively silent on the role of Black South Africans in this war. Revisionist and radical historians have played their part in rectifying this. The War Museum of the Boer Republics in Bloemfontein has championed studies, created space and provided resources for studies that look at the role of black South Africans in the war. It is in this context that Black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 and An illustrated history of Black South Africans in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 have been launched.

The latter book is sub-titled ‘A Forgotten History’. The authors state that: “At the start of the Anglo-Boer War both the British and the Boers subscribed to the philosophy of a ‘White Man’s War.’ The Boers kept to this philosophy at the beginning of the war, but the British departed from it immediately after war broke out.”

The book estimates that the British armed almost 100 000 black people towards the end of the war as the guerrilla warfare tactics adopted by the Boers began to make inroads. Johan van Zyl, Rodney Constantine and Tokkie Pretorius have presented a new view of history, in this way transforming and enriching the narrative of a war that prepared the ground for a South African state, which would shape the better part of the century. Black people played their part in that war, both willingly and unwittingly, as active participants and yet also, for the most part, unwittingly, as those caught up in a situation where imperialist expansionists fought for the right to rule South Africa, to profit from the spoils of war – namely the vast and then still largely untapped mineral resources - and exploit people as cheap labour. Those who participated were not only ‘agterryers’ who assisted the Boers, but also fighters, at times armed with rifles and ammunition. Women performed domestic work. Men cared for horses and carried supplies. Some took over farms, only later to be dispossessed once more.

The loss of land through the Native Land Act of 1913 entrenched this process. Through numerous photographs the book shows the role of black people as well as graphic details around the sieges of the war and the results of the scorched earth policy that saw furniture, farmhouses, kraals, cattle and crops destroyed by the British. There are pictures of white children starving in camps and images of the dead. We see black servants in the background and the white families they served in the forefront.

In the white concentration camps it is estimated that 28 000 Boers died, mostly women and young children. Through the book Black Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 by the late Reverend Stowell Kessler, we learn about the 100 black concentration camps of this war where at least 21 000 black people died. Kessler argues that the “black and white concentration camps were both part of an antiguerilla warfare system, which had as its goal removing as far as possible every living person, animal and sustenance giving plant from the veld.”

In his diary later published as The Boer War Diary of Sol T Plaatje, Sol Plaatje, then a clerk in the Cape Government Service, described a morning in the besieged town then called Mafeking in the following way: “What a lovely morning after yesterday’s rains. It is really evil to disturb a beautiful morning like this with the rattling of Mausers [ammunition] and whizzes and explosions of shells.” Yet that ‘rattling’ ripped through the decades and exploded through the hearts of future generations, and left its physical scars on the landscape that we still reside in today.
AFTERWORD
by Deputy Minister, Dr Joe Phaahla

Our Department declared 2012 as the year of Heritage in recognition of the 100 year celebration of the oldest liberation movement on the African continent. This is a year when we join members and supporters of the African National Congress (ANC) in marking a historic watershed in the shaping of what is today a free and democratic Republic of South Africa. We have gone further to declare the theme of this heritage month (September 2012) as “celebrating the Heroes and Heroines of our Liberation Struggle”.

The choice of 12 September for this debate is very befitting. It was on this day 35 years ago that we woke up to the news that Stephen Bantu Biko had been murdered by the security police. Steve Biko was only 30 years old at the time of his murder, but he was unquestionably already an influential figure in the re-emergence of popular resistance against the apartheid regime. Biko and his generation of young, mainly university student activists, filled a vacuum left by the incarceration of leaders of the ANC, Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and other allied organisations within the liberation movement in 1960. By moving out of the multiracial liberal National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), declaring that “Black man you are on your own” and advocating the psychological liberation from the racist subjugation of the regime, they planted the seed of black pride and confidence that black people were the only guarantee of their own liberation. In recognition of Biko’s contribution to our struggle for freedom, we have partnered with the Steve Biko Foundation to construct the Steve Biko Memorial Centre with Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) funding of more than R100 million in Ginsberg.

As we celebrate the heroes and heroines of our struggle we draw inspiration from their contributions, their commitments, their values and aspirations and we learn from their legacies. We learn from the lives and times of our warrior kings and generals and foot soldiers who led our people in battles in defence of their land, crops, livestock and their own dignity. Even when they were outgunned by superior firepower they never gave up. We admire the resistance of the Khoi and San in the south, the Xhosa under King Hintsa and others from the east, the Zulus under Kings Shaka, Dingaan, Cetewayo and others also from the east, the Shangaans in the south, the Xhosas under King Hintsa and others in the north to mention a few.

They fought hard to preserve their cultures, languages and customs which are today protected by our democratic Constitution. We celebrate the wisdom of the founding fathers and mothers of our early formal political and social movements. We celebrate the lives of Charlotte Maxeke, Ida Mtwana, Clements Kadalie, W Champion, Abdullah Abduraman, JT Jabavu, Mahatma Gandhi and others. We pay homage to the founders of the earliest liberation movement in Africa, we salute JL Dube, Pixley Ka Isaka Seme, Solomon Plaatje, Selowelile Makgatho and their peers. We recognise the founders of the early trade unions such as the ICU. As we face the challenges of transforming our economy, addressing poverty, unemployment and inequality we are reminded of the mineworkers struggles of the 1920s, the 1940s and 1980s. We remember the critical roles of worker leaders such as JB Marks, Ray Alexander, Moses Kotane, Billy Nair, Vuyisile Mini, Curnick Ndlouv, Emma Mashinini, Rita Ndzanga and many others. We recognise their role in laying the foundation for the building of the progressive trade union movement we have today.

We celebrate the men and women who stood up against the increasingly brutal apartheid regime after 1948. We appreciate all the volunteers of Chief Albert Luthuli led by volunteer in Chief Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela who came forward to defy various unjust laws. We pay homage to the more than 20 000 women who refused to carry passes and marched to the Union Buildings with a clear message to Strydom “You have struck a woman, you have struck a rock.” “Wa thinta bafazi wa thinta mbokodo”. This is our history, this is our heritage. Can we rekindle the spirit of volunteerism as an antidote to the greed, selfishness and moral decay which are creeping into our society today?

Today we are not being asked to die for any cause because others have done so for us. All that our country expects of us today is to have the commitment to serve with honour, humility, selflessness in contributing towards the creation of a truly non-racial, non-sexist, prosperous, caring and proud nation.

It is within the context of understanding the importance of preserving and promoting our heritage that the DAC has identified more than 28 heritage and related projects which it is attending to in this financial year. These projects will go a long way in contributing to social cohesion, nation building and reconciliation. We also hope that these sites will contribute towards local economic development by becoming tourist attractions where both South Africans and foreigners will come to learn more about where we come from.

An edited version of the address by Deputy Minister Joe Phaahla at the Heritage Day debate in the National Assembly, Parliament, Cape Town, September 2012
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